

**LOSS OF THE DREAM: STORIES OF MID-LIFE DIVORCE**

A Dissertation

by

MARILYN RUST LEIGHMAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2009

Major Subject: Educational Psychology

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Joyce Juntune
	William R. Nash
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	Donald Sweeney
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## **ABSTRACT**

Loss of the Dream: Stories of Mid-life Divorce.

(December 2009)

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Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Joyce Juntune  
Dr. William R. Nash

The divorce experiences of seven mid-life women were investigated using Bohannan's (1970) and Hagemeyer's (1986) divorce theories as a framework to guide the research. In-depth interviews and visual interpretation were used: (a) to determine the greatest challenges and losses experienced by mid-life women after divorce; (b) to identify factors which contribute to resilience and determine coping mechanisms used by mid-life women following divorce; and (c) to assess long-term effects of divorce on mid-life women several years after the event. The results of this study included the following findings: The women in the study had been divorced from 7 to 18 years and all agreed that losing the dream of the "happily ever after marriage" and the loss of the family unit were the most difficult losses they experienced. Other losses included the loss of identity as a married person, loss of home and assets, loss of income, and loss of relationship with children. Factors affecting resilience and coping mechanisms included working at a job or profession, support of family and friends, faith and spirituality and social activities and dating. These were unanimous choices among the participants. Long-term effects were both positive and negative. Negative effects included continued

feelings of loss concerning the family unit, lingering anger, and lack of forgiveness toward the former spouse. Positive aspects included increased resilience, autonomy, personal achievement, and spiritual growth.

## DEDICATION

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” Psalms 27:1*

I dedicate this effort to the most important beings in my life. First, I thank my Heavenly Father for endowing me with the abilities I have and allowing me to have the opportunities I have had in my life. He sent His Son, Jesus to die for me. I am deeply loved, totally accepted, and absolutely complete in Him.

Second, I want to thank my earthly father, Roy Cummins, who called me his “pride and joy.” Without him, I would not have been able to achieve the goals I have set for myself. It is said that your feelings about your earthly father determine your feelings for the Heavenly One. I know that this is true for me. I have always felt loved, protected and esteemed by my Dad. I also wish to dedicate this work to my mother, Norma Cummins, who always showed me unconditional love and encouraged me to pursue my dreams. Both of my parents have gone on ahead to be with the Lord, but they are remembered and loved for their constant support and encouragement.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my husband, Earl Leighman. He is the kindest, sweetest companion a woman could have. He has supported me in my efforts and has always found the right words to encourage me to achieve my goals.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Proverbs 17:17*

A person is considered lucky if she has a few good friends in life; I am lucky indeed. My friends have supplied the needed encouragement for me to pursue my goal of a doctoral degree (at my age!) When most people are thinking about retirement, I was thinking about reaching for my dream of a Ph.D. I lived in College Station and Texas A&M University was right here. My friends encouraged me to “go for it” and the rest is history.

First, I would like to thank the faculty and students at Texas A&M University who befriended me and supported me in this process. My Co-Chair, Dr. Joyce Juntune has been my mentor and encourager from the first. Her classes were the first ones that I took when I started at Texas A&M. Her classes inspired me to be a more creative teacher, by following her example. She has walked me through the process of the dissertation and offered her advice and encouragement throughout. She has always made me feel empowered and has had the “expectation” that I would make it all the way. My other Co-Chair, Dr. William R. Nash has also been a wonderful teacher and encourager. His creativity classes were fun and informative and helped me see my own creativity. I would also like to thank Dr. Yvonna Lincoln and Dr. Carolyn Clark for their inspiring courses in qualitative research, which have influenced my work in this

study. I also wish to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Donald Sweeney and Dr. Michael Ash, for providing their suggestions and encouragement.

Second, I wish to thank the six women who candidly shared their stories with me so that I could complete my study of mid-life divorce. These women were willing to share the intimate details of their lives concerning one of the most difficult experiences that anyone could face. Their courage and openness encouraged me and supported me in this study.

Next, I wish to thank the “daughter of my heart,” Tina DeValk, who was my constant companion when I first moved to College Station. She always believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. I also want to thank my girlfriends, Locke Pachall and Shana Yates who encouraged me all the way. My sons and daughters-in-law, Wade and Shannon Rust and Mac and Lani Rust were also encouraging to me. I remember one time when I was losing my drive, my daughter-in-law, Shannon, said, “Marilyn, all I’ve heard you talk about is getting your Ph.D., so you can’t quit now!” She was right and I needed to hear that from her.

Finally, I must thank my husband, Earl Leighman, who has put up with all of my “going to school” since we were married in 2002. I actually started on this in June of 2002 and we married in July 2002. So, he has been my biggest encourager for the 7 years we have been married. My life would not be the same without him and I thank God for such an awesome blessing and precious partner.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Divorce, though common in the United States, is, to those experiencing it, like a free-fall into the dark unknown. The raw emotions, the loss of identity, and feelings of doubt and low self-worth combine to cause the traveler to experience a “savage emotional journey” (Trafford, 1992). The early stage plunges the individual into an intense state of emotional and social anomie - literally normlessness. Old roles have disappeared, but new ones have not developed. The participants vacillate between love and hate, anger and sadness, euphoria and depression (Ahrons and Rodgers, 1987).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

It is well documented that divorce rates increased substantially during the 1960's and 1970's for all age groups. After 1980, divorce rates for younger women stabilized, but the rates continue to increase for women past mid-life (Uhlenberg, Cooney, and Boyd, 1990). One-fifth of all divorces in recent years have been granted to women over 40, and it is conservatively estimated that 11-12% of women still in their first marriages at age 40 will eventually divorce (Uhlenberg, et al., 1990). “Divorce as a significant factor in the lives of older Americans is a contemporary phenomenon” (Weingarten, 1988, p.21). The rate of divorce during the decade of the 1980's “increased 50% among persons between the ages of 40 and 65 and 35% among persons 65 and older. Simple

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This dissertation follows the style of the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*.

projections of current demographic and cultural trends indicate that the incidence of late life divorce will continue to increase in the future” (Weingarten, 1988, p.22).

Despite the increasing rates of divorce for mid-life women, research into this phenomenon has been deficient. “Our knowledge of how people are affected by and cope with divorce in later life is still in its infancy” (Weingarten, 1988, p. 22). Current lack of empirical testing on older women remains “a serious gap both in our knowledge concerning the older population and in our understanding of the dynamics of divorce” (Lloyd & Zick, 1986, p.89). The literature on divorce gives limited attention to the current pattern of divorce for individuals past mid-life (Uhlenberg, et al., 1990). “Little is known about how women who divorce in mid-life negotiate the transition to singlehood” (McDaniel and Coleman, 2003, p. 104; Hagestad and Smyer, 1982).

It is not surprising that little is known about divorce among mid-life women due to the lack of empirical studies on women at any age or stage of life. “To date, there is no psychology, sociology, real history, or coherent social science theory about women of any age. Previous studies were conducted mainly on dysfunctional women (Freud, 1933), and reflected the perspectives of men” (Bowles & Klein, 1983; as cited in Jacobson, 1993, p.427). This study seeks to add to the knowledge concerning mid-life women and their transition from marriage to single hood.

At this point, it is important to identify “mid-life women” as belonging to the “pre-baby boom” and “baby boom” cohorts. Pre-baby boom women were born before or during World War II and most were reared with traditional values of home and family. They experienced fewer opportunities in education and in male-dominated

professions such as medicine, law, and business. Women did not generally participate in roles outside the home and men were the breadwinners. Women were expected to follow the traditional patterns of early marriage, childbearing, and child rearing (Jacobson, 1993).

The “baby boom” generation, born after the war in 1946, has been recognized as being more liberal than the earlier generation. They have had more educational and career opportunities, more sexual freedom, and married at later ages. They were socialized during an era of television, affluence, the sexual revolution, illegal drug use, and the Viet Nam War. This generation has continued to maintain many traditional values, with a few accommodations. The vast majority of these women choose marriage and child bearing, but these occur later in life and they have fewer children. Women in this group continue to work after their children are born (Jacobson, 1993).

In the present study participants are from the “pre-baby boom” and early “baby boom” generations. For many of these women the divorce phenomenon goes against the “dream” scenario of marrying for life as their mothers and fathers had done. Growing up in the 1950’s and early 1960’s, divorce was for other people, *not us*. This study seeks to identify how these women, who had such high expectations for their marriages, have dealt with their own personal crisis of a divorce after long-term marriage. For me, this is a personal journey, because I am one of these women. This is my story as well as the story of other women who have shared this experience.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the complex process of divorce as experienced by mid-life women who have been married for twenty years or more. The main focus will be on the losses experienced, resiliency and the coping mechanisms used, and the long-term effects of the divorce several years after the event. The ultimate goal of this work is to provide positive insights and constructive suggestions for women facing divorce after long-term marriage and for the counselors and therapists who work with these women.

A naturalistic inquiry research design will be used to report the findings of this project. Paul Bohannon's (1970) six stations of divorce model will be used to analyze the interview data. Visual interpretation will also be used to explore participants' feelings about the divorce experience. The project will focus on the following specific objectives:

- A. To determine the greatest challenges and losses experienced by mid-life women after divorce.
- B. To identify factors which contribute to resilience and determine coping mechanisms used by mid-life women following divorce.
- C. To assess long-term effects of divorce on mid-life women several years after the event.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were the greatest challenges and losses experienced by mid-life women after divorce?
2. How did the women develop resilience during the divorce process and what coping mechanisms were used by mid-life women following divorce?
3. What are the long-term effects of divorce on mid-life women several years after the divorce?

### **Limitations**

Generalization is not appropriate in a largely qualitative study rather transferability is the more relevant goal. If the findings are transferable to others in similar situations, then the results of the study are useful. In this study, it is hoped that the findings will be useful in helping other mid-life women facing divorce and provide insights for people in the helping professions when working with this population.

Since the participants in this study were white, middle-class females, the results are limited in their generalizability to males and individuals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The small sample size is also a limitation. Patterns and conclusions drawn from a small sample do not necessarily apply for the remaining divorced population. Additionally, the exclusive use of self-report measures may be skewed in favor of the “wife’s version of the story” versus the “husband’s version”. Future research in this domain would benefit from other forms of measurement with different populations.



### **Definition of Terms**

**Mid-life women:** Women who range in age from 40 to 65.

**Pre-baby boom generation:** Individuals born before and during WWII; male-dominated professions not open to women; women followed traditional roles of wife and mother.

**Baby boom generation:** Individuals born after WWII in 1946 and following; recognized as being more liberal than earlier generations; more affluent; more educational and career opportunities.

**Resilience:** Successful adaptation after exposure to adversity.

**Coping Strategies:** Ways individuals come to terms with adversity and learn to function in spite of difficulties.

**Denial:** Refusing to face reality; pretending it never happened

**Self-medication:** Using drugs, alcohol, and other methods to deaden feelings of loss

**Forgiveness:** Letting go of negative thoughts, feelings and behaviors in response to wrongdoing

**Initiators:** The partner in the marriage who initiates or seeks the divorce.

**Noninitiators:** The partner in the marriage who does not seek or want the divorce.

### **Design of the Dissertation**

In the following chapter, a review of historical and current literature pertaining to divorce will be presented. The methodology for the study will be described in Chapter III. The individual stories of the seven women who participated in the study will be the

focus of Chapter IV. Chapter V will include the emergent themes, the main findings from the study, the conclusions and ideas for further research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **RELATED LITERATURE**

How do people react to stressful life events involving loss? Some studies show that divorced people are at higher risk for health and mental problems (Reissman & Gerstel, 1985), while others facing the same events appear resilient and remain healthy (Reissman, 1989). According to Marris (1986), with any loss there is a crisis of discontinuity for the self. Customary structures are lost, and the individual must reinterpret the world finding new structures of meaning (Marris, 1986). Weiss (1975) found that people construct accounts or a history of marital failure: a story of who did what to whom. Weiss argues that these accounts serve important psychological functions, allocating blame and imposing order on otherwise disordered events (Weiss, 1975).

#### **Theories of Divorce Adjustment**

Divorce adjustment theories have been introduced to identify the processes used by individuals during the transition from marriage to single hood. Waller (1938) proposed one of the original psychological transition models. He suggested four stages that included: (a) breaking old habits, (b) beginning of reconstruction of life, (c) seeking new love objects, and (d) readjustment completed. These stages included an inherent assumption, typical of most early theorists that adjustment to divorce involved remarriage (Castil, 1996).

Another early theorist was Paul Bohannon (1970), who saw the divorce transition process as including six stations. He calls these subdivisions the emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community, and psychic divorce. This model is a process-oriented approach to divorce.

The most commonly theorized model of divorce recovery uses a grief recovery model based on Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief (Crosby, Gage, & Raymond, 1983). This model includes the transition phases of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Kubler-Ross' (1969) model has provided a beginning point for understanding divorce grief, yet her stages are not universally accepted (Castil, 1996).

Weiss (1975) reduced Kubler-Ross' model to three stages of the divorce process. These stages include: Stage 1: feelings of shock and denial; Stage 2: feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, lowered feelings of self-esteem, withdrawal and distancing; and Stage 3: feelings of acceptance, adjustment, and comfort in being single.

Arthur Frank (1995) offers an "Illness Narrative" which mirrors the divorce process with the stages of Restitution, Chaos, and Quest. In the Restitution Phase, the individual is in denial about the situation (illness or divorce). They try everything to get things to be "normal" again. The shock and denial begin to turn into the next phase which is the Chaos Phase. The individual is angry, depressed, confused, deeply hurt, and cannot decide what to do. It is "crazy time" as described by Trafford (1992). The third phase is the Quest Phase. This is the stage when the individual accepts the reality of the divorce and seeks to make a new life in the "new normal."

All of these models have similar concepts in common. All include emotional upheaval, behavioral change, chaos, and adjustment. How mid-life women negotiate the process of divorce adjustment is the focus of the current research. For the purposes of the current research, Bohannon's (1970) model will be used in analysis of the data.

### **Factors Affecting Adjustment**

#### *Timing of Break-up and Initiator Status*

Spanier and Castro (1979) studied the factors which impacted adjustment to divorce. In their study, the degree to which the separation was sudden and unexpected was positively related to the degree of initial emotional problems. This can be related to a long, slow illness before death versus a sudden death. In the slower process, the grieving occurs along the way and death is seen as a release. In the sudden death, shock and denial are the most common reactions and the individuals are left with questions, disbelief, anger and confusion.

Bevino and Sharkin (2003) suggest that "initiator status" also plays a role in divorce adjustment. "Being the initiator of an important life change could give one a sense of control. Having the life change thrust upon one may diminish the sense of effectiveness, rendering the noninitiator less able to use this change in a constructive way" (Pettit & Bloom, 1984 p. 587).

Green (1983), states that most people have contemplated divorcing their partner on the average five years prior to actually leaving, thus constituting time for emotional detachment. This pre-separation period is one of special turmoil for the initiating party (Pettit & Bloom, 1984). The "initiator" of the divorce has time to consider all of the

factors involved in the process of divorce; therefore, they are prepared for the event. The unsuspecting spouse may be blindsided by the event and suffer from shock, disbelief, and severe emotional turmoil. Goode (1956) found that the “noninitiators” were likely to be the most highly traumatized. The least trauma occurred when the decision to divorce was a mutual one (Goode, 1956).

Pettit and Bloom (1984), reported that a higher number of initiators were female, younger, and had been married for a shorter period of time. Initiators were also less family-oriented. Contrary to expectations, there were “no significant differences between initiators and noninitiators in stress-related symptoms at any point in the postseparation period” (p. 591). This finding contradicts the earlier study by Goode (1956), who states that noninitiators were the most likely to be traumatized by the divorce. It should be noted that these initiators were much younger (and from a different era) than the mid-life women in the present study.

### *Finding Meaning*

Bevvino and Sharkin (2003), state that posttraumatic growth may occur after periods of negative life events such as death of a loved one or divorce. The importance of finding meaning in a traumatic event comes from the philosophy of Viktor Frankl (1963). According to Frankl, the search for meaning is a primary human motivation often prompted by suffering. Bevvino and Sharkin (2003) found that “finding meaning made a significant contribution to well-being over and above the other predictor variables” (p. 92). This finding suggests that when an individual is able to find meaning

from the divorce, this may be especially important in facilitating positive divorce adjustment.

#### *Additional Factors*

Goode (1956) found that occupational status and level of education had little effect on trauma, distress, or adjustment. However, income was related to adjustment: the higher the level of income, the better the adjustment and the lower the levels of distress. Higher social participation was also correlated with adjustment. Spanier and Castro (1979) found that participants who engaged in social interaction with friends and family had fewer adjustment difficulties. Fewer adjustment problems were also reported by individuals who participated in heterosexual dating or cohabitation.

### **Challenges and Losses from Divorce**

#### *Divorce as a Process*

In their study of mid-life divorce, Hagestad and Smyer (1982), state that divorce is a “multifaceted process of multiple social and psychological ceasings” (p. 187). For most couples, the longer they were married, the greater the number of bonds that must be broken in the divorce process. The process-oriented view is also held by Paul Bohannan (1970). Bohannan’s “six stations” model divides divorce into six distinct areas that can be studied and analyzed independently. Bohannan’s six stations are:

*Emotional divorce.* The first visible stage of a deteriorating marriage is called the emotional divorce. Spouses withhold emotion from the relationship and their attraction and trust for one another have disappeared. In emotional divorce, people grow apart and become mutually antagonistic (Bohannan, 1970).

*Legal divorce.* In American society, the formalizing of the dissolution of a marriage has been turned over to the courts (Bohannon, 1970). In addition to obtaining the right to remarry, the legal termination of marriage also requires selection of legal counsel, division of property, and allocation of parental custody and rights. Child and spousal support (in some states) are also determined (McDaniel & Coleman, 2003). The longer the marriage, the greater the intertwining of assets which often requires lengthy litigation which increases the emotional and financial stress placed on the divorcing parties (DeShane & Brown-Wilson, 1981).

*Economic divorce.* Marriage is not only a romantic bond, but a financial bond as well. At the time of a divorce, the couple must divide the assets and liabilities in a way that is acceptable to both parties. Most often, women are the most economically disadvantaged after a divorce (Uhlenberg, Cooney, & Boyd, 1990). When divorced women are compared to widows over the age of 40, divorced women are at greater financial risk, live closer to the poverty line, have higher labor force participation, and have fewer financial assets (Uhlenberg, et al., 1990).

*Coparental divorce.* “The most enduring pain of divorce is likely to come from the coparental divorce. This odd word is useful because it indicates that the child’s parents are divorced from each other – not from the child” (Bohannon, 1970, p. 45). Establishing separate independent lives while still carrying out the function of parent is a complex process that begins before the marital separation and continues long after the legal divorce (Emery, 1994). Mid-life women may not have small children in the home, but there are important considerations which still impact the family. Research on adult



child-parent relationships reveals that the parental role remains important even after the children are grown and that revisions in parent-child relationships take place no matter what age divorce occurs (Hagestad, Smyer, & Stierman, 1984).

*Community divorce.* “Like newly marrieds, new divorcees have to find new communities. They tend to find them among the divorced” (Bohannon, 1970, p. 52). Divorce requires women to start over in many areas. Often, she must find new friends, a new place to live and possibly a new job. She is no longer part of “a couple” and must go places alone. These extreme changes all come at a time when she may be devastated by grief and not really in the best psychological state to venture out into a new world. But for those who make the transition, the majority of women report developing new post-divorce friendships and especially closer friendships with women than they had prior to the divorce (Hayes & Anderson, 1993).

*Psychic divorce.* According to Bohannon (1970), the psychic divorce is the most difficult of the six divorces, but it can be personally the most constructive. The psychic divorce involves learning to live without the support of another person. It means that you have no one to blame for your successes or failures. Establishing a post-divorce identity may be especially difficult for people who have been in long-term marriages. Roles become established and a strong sense of attachment develops between husband and wife (Hagestad & Smyer, 1982). Psychic adjustment to divorce also depends on age and gender. Although the divorce rates for older women are increasing, the probability of remarriage for women over 45 is low in comparison to men and younger women (Uhlenberg, et al., 1990). Older women are less likely to remarry partly because there

are more women than men in older age groups and men, more than women, are socially “allowed “ and encouraged to find younger companions (Hagestad & Smyer, 1982).

The psychic divorce can be a personally constructive state (Bohannon, 1970). Women who re-establish a strong individual identity often experience a heightened sense of competence and self-worth. After their divorce, 84% of the women in Hayes and Anderson’s (1993) study felt freer to be themselves and to meet their own needs instead of focusing on the needs of others, and over 40% of the women ages 45-59 preferred their new freedom to remarriage.

#### *Losses from Divorce*

Stanley Hagemeyer (1986) states that “divorce brings the loss of psycho-social components which together have made up the meaning and content of marriage” (p. 239). Each loss can also be seen as a crisis which must be resolved in order to go on to new health and wholeness. Hagemeyer states that Bohannon’s six stations of divorce can be seen as six losses. To these he adds: “the loss of the dream and the loss of physical accessibility” (Hagemeyer, 1986, p. 340).

*The loss of the dream.* When pre baby-boom women married, their example for marriage was their own family of origin. Most families of the era consisted of mom, dad, and the kids. Divorce was uncommon. These women expected their marriages to be like their parents’ marriage. The women also idealized marriage with the expectation of happiness and fulfillment with the man of their dreams. Their hopes and expectations of an “ideal marriage” were eventually discarded. According to Hagemeyer (1986), this “loss of the dream” often contributes to depression in one of the partners. “ The loss will

likely occur in all marriages at some time, and the partners may go on to develop a more mature relationship built upon more realistic expectations, goals, and negotiated commitments, however, if not resolved, the loss frequently brings on other manifestations of marriage difficulties” (Hagemeyer, 1986 p. 240).

For mid-life women, the “loss of the dream” entails the loss of the “happily ever after” story that they expected to have. It means they will *not* keep their vow of “til death do us part”. They will *not* grow old with the father of their children and will *not* welcome children and grandchildren to their home for holidays and birthdays with their nuclear family intact. It also includes all of the years of commitment which women have invested in the marriage which are now discarded by the former spouse. In a study by Wallerstein (1986), women in the over 40 age group “felt aggrieved and angered after having worked hard to fulfill the requirements of being a devoted wife and mother”(p. 72) and then being cast aside by their husbands after many years of marriage. The “loss of the dream” is one of the greatest losses these women experience.

*The loss of physical accessibility.* “The loss of complete openness and trust, Bohannon’s Emotional Divorce, develops when one or both partners begin to make commitments which take precedence over the marriage partner” (Hagemeyer, 1986 p. 240). Partners find other interests and commitments and emotional distance develops. Hagemeyer (1986) explains:

Children, jobs, and even sexual affairs focus the emotional energies away from the marriage partner. Criticism and belittling, even in public, replace the compliments and appreciation of better times. The loss of emotional intimacy is

often marked by decreased involvement or complete absence of sexual activity. In public, the couple may be seen together regularly, but at home they sleep in separate bedrooms. Seething anger may develop in at least one of the pair at the deep disappointment in the marriage. The couple may decide to separate and make public what has been developing for years. The emotional isolation experienced before within the home is now confirmed by the complete loss of accessibility (p. 240-241).

### *Challenges for Mid-life Women in Divorce*

*Psychological distress.* Divorce is recognized as one of the most stressful events an individual will face in life (Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Dixon & Rettig, 1994). Divorce is traumatic because lives are organized around particular relationships (such as husband and wife) that are crucial to how people find meaning in their lives. When one loses an important relationship, whole structures of meaning and life routines around the relationship disintegrate. These losses often lead to distress, anxiety and grief (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003). Findings from a ten-year longitudinal study by Wallerstein (1986) showed that in the 10-year follow-up interviews, 54% of women and 60% of men still had feelings of anger, sexual jealousy, guilt, nostalgia, friendship and longing associated with the former marriage.

Although the specter of living alone is a problem for divorced women of all ages, anxiety for older women is greater and more widespread than younger women. They fear the departure of the last child from home and some may have thoughts of suicide. Psychosomatic symptoms are significantly higher in this group of older women and 50%

of them are clinically depressed. The incidence of depression is no different at the 10-year follow-up than it was at the time of the separation and divorce (Wallerstein, 1986).

*Loss of identity.* “For most people, becoming married is the major attempt at gaining a certain part of one’s identity. Becoming separated is a process of losing that part of the identity; many individuals liken it to losing a limb” (Hagemeyer, 1986, p. 245). The loss of identity is most profound in women whose identity is unknown outside the marriage (Hagemeyer, 1986). Mid-life women often fall into this category.

*Loss of financial support.* Family incomes of divorced women are estimated to be 13 to 35 percent lower than for married women (Holden & Smock, 1991; Peterson, 1996). Divorce is clearly associated with a lower likelihood of home ownership (Bernardo, 1982). Divorced women have fewer assets to fall back on in case of financial hardship and are often pushed to remain in the workforce in order to survive financially. They are also more likely to share a residence with others in order to reduce costs (Uhlenberg et al., 1990).

*Anger.* Intense anger and bitterness appear not to have faded much over the 10-year period reported by Wallerstein (1986). In fact, 44% of the women and 20% of the men were intensely angry at the time of the divorce and remained angry at the 10-year follow-up interview. The continuing anger among women rises with age. Over half of the women who were 34 years or older at the time of the divorce continue to be angry, while only 15% of women in their twenties at the time of divorce continue to be angry at the 10-year mark (Wallerstein, 1986). Factors which contributed to this continued anger include the stress of being a single parent, continued anxiety about living alone,

competition for the loyalty of the children, and economic worries, especially if the husband was financially successful (Wallerstein, 1986).

Wallerstein noted that conflict with their former husbands, perpetuated by the women was observable in 20% of the families in this study. Remarriage failed to diminish their antagonism (Wallerstein, 1986). Attachment in a negative form can become a way of life as the lost partner becomes the focus of repeated confrontations, harassment, or games played to settle old scores (Hagemeyer, 1986).

### **Resilience and Coping with Loss**

#### *Resilience*

Werner and Smith (1993) describe resilience as successful adaptation after exposure to adversity. Resilience is defined as an individual's overall ability and disposition to positively adjust in the face of a major adversity (McMillen, 1999). When applied to divorce, it is the ability to "bounce back" from the process of divorce to a former state of positive adjustment (Quinney & Fouts, 2003).

There are four common outcomes that follow adversity such as divorce: succumbing (giving up, alcoholism, suicide), survival with impairment (long-term negative psychological effects), recovery (return to the previous level of adjustment) and thriving (experiencing growth beyond the previous level of adjustment). The latter three are considered resilient (Carver, 1998; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995).

Resilience is a complex integration of psychological traits, biological predispositions, and external support systems (Quinney & Fouts, 2003). According to

Seibert (1996), the roots of human resiliency are the inner resources of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-concept. When these are strong, positive and healthy, one can cope with divorce, job loss, and other life adversities. If these inner resources are not strong, coping skills are weak (Seibert, 1996).

*Self-esteem* is your emotional opinion of yourself, how you feel about yourself as a person. A demotion, job loss, or divorce may uncover how your feelings of esteem were derived from that title or social role. *Self-confidence* refers to how well you expect to do in a new activity. Generally this confidence is based on your abilities and strengths. Self-confident people know that can count on themselves more than they can count on anyone else. *Self-concept* refers to your idea about who and what you are (Seibert, 1996).

Many women who have been married for a long time see themselves as a married woman even after they are divorced. Seibert (1996) explains:

A divorced person survives the emotional blow better when his or her inner “selves” are strong. People who don’t cope well may have been relying on their spouses to compensate for deficits in their self-esteem or self-concept [which may have contributed to the break-up of the marriage] (p. 146-7).

According to Seibert (1996) resilience can be strengthened in individuals by focusing on the three inner resources of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept. Strengthening resilience in the case of divorce will overflow into other aspects of a person’s life. Quinney and Fouts (2003) found that resilience can be strengthened by well-designed interventions. Resilience gained in divorce recovery workshops may have

long-term effects for facing future adversities encountered by individuals throughout the lifespan.

Greff & Van Der Merwe (2004) identified seven resilience factors which contributed to stability of individuals and families after divorce. These included *intra-family support* (support family members provide each other), *family support* (support from extended family), *support of friends*, *faith* (belief in a higher power - 99% Christian), *financial and work security* (especially if the parent was female), *alternative support resources* (neighbors, schools, and churches), and *family hardiness* (how well the family can handle the crisis).

### *Creativity and Resilience*

Just as a strong self-concept and healthy self-confidence are important in resilience, creativity is also seen as a factor which contributes to resilience. Metzl (2008) found that specific traits linked with creativity such as originality, flexibility, and extroversion help predict emotional resilience after natural disaster (in this case, hurricane Katrina). Bloyd (2004) found that creative thinking increased as stress increased in a group of individuals designated as the “hardy” group. Flach (2004) in his book, *Resilience*, states that creativity is an essential part of resilience.

Creativity is seen as one of the personality traits of resilient people. According to Flach (2004):

Psychological testing of creative individuals has shown a close connection between creativity and our ability to deal with stress. On the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, creative people show significantly low scores



for a wide spectrum of tendencies associated with poor coping abilities, such as hysteria, paranoia, and social introversion. Other studies have shown that creative people possess a higher than average quantity of traits commonly associated with ego-strength, such as dominance, responsibility, self-control, tolerance, intellectual efficiency, and openness to feelings and ideas, and a wide range of interests (p. 150).

Flach (2004) states that “the cycle of falling apart and subsequently putting the pieces of ourselves and our lives together again in a new form” is a central recurring theme throughout the life cycle (p. xviii). Falling apart only represents the initial phase in the cycle of responding resiliently to stress. Resilience also means the strength to limit the extent of the disruption and to reassemble the pieces of our lives afterwards. This is the disruption-reintegration process. Flach (2004) presents a new perspective by suggesting that:

It is the disruption, and most commonly a period of dysfunction that often constitutes a truly healthy response to meaningful stress, whether occurring concurrently with such stress or after the immediate threat has subsided. It is not the disruption that is the illness. Instead, disease is the failure to disrupt when disruption is called for, and the failure to reintegrate afterwards to form a new synthesis (p. 20).

When discussing creativity as an aspect of resilience, Flach (2004) explains that the creative act adheres to the law of disruption and reintegration. At the heart of creativity, is the ability to respond to a situation with adaptive solutions to accomplish a

goal. When divorce disrupts a marriage, the person must plunge into chaos (disruption). When using the same old efforts to resolve the problems are no longer effective, we feel helpless and even hopeless for a time. “To unlearn old strategies in favor of new ones is stressful, which is why adaptability becomes harder as we grow older” (Flach, 2004, p. 147). Creativity is called upon to rearrange the facts of the situation into a “new normal” where the individual can survive and thrive in the future (reintegration).

### *Coping Strategies*

Personal interpretations of divorce may increase stress levels and lower self-esteem. A negative attitude towards divorce may result in feelings of failure. Depression and guilt are frequently reported emotions following divorce (Fisher & Alberti, 2000). In order to alleviate post-divorce anxiety and self-esteem issues, individuals utilize a variety of coping skills including denial, self-medication, and focusing in an area of life such as the workplace. Some individuals become preoccupied with remaining busy and fill every waking hour with activities (Fisher & Alberti, 2000). Males tend to prefer seeking new intimate relationships (Bevino, 2000) while women seek help from family and friends to alleviate their distress (Colburn, Lin, & Moore, 1992). Some people turn to private counseling, church support groups, or divorce workshops (Quinney & Fouts, 2003). Participation in divorce workshops has shown to facilitate divorce adjustment and successful adaptation to life following divorce (Quinney & Fouts, 2003).

Walsh (1998) emphasizes the importance of a family finding meaning in a crisis. She refers to the role played by religious faith, and emphasizes the importance of

spirituality, belief, hope, initiative, perseverance, humor and encouragement between family members during the recovery from crises. Nathanson (1995) found that divorce is a spiritual crisis that challenges old beliefs and reshapes future perceptions.

In Nathanson's (1995) study, the participants were asked about their feelings about divorce when they first married. All of the respondents answered that they "never thought divorce would happen to them, believing that marriage was a lifetime commitment" (p. 184). This premise is common among mid-life women of the "pre-baby boom" and "baby boom" generations. The respondents in the study became angry with themselves, their spouse, the legal system and even with God. Despite the intense feelings of anguish and pain, for 83% of the respondents, the divorce experience ultimately strengthened spirituality. Spirituality facilitated divorce recovery and was a major source of support (Nathanson, 1995).

Overcoming anger and moving on with life, is an area where mid-life women often become stalemated. In a 10-year follow-up of divorced families, anger is still a problem for many women. Wallerstein (1986) found:

A significant number of women who have been married for an extended portion of their adult years, have not resolved feelings of anger that have their roots in a sense of outrage and betrayal. Tragically, it appears that anger associated with divorce can persist over ten years, well into remarriage and continue to infuse interactions with the former spouse in regard to the children (p. 77).

Resolving anger seems to be an extremely difficult task for mid-life women following divorce, especially those women who were married for many years. Seibert

(1996) explains how one woman who was a survivor of Auschwitz resolved her feelings of anger from the past. Edith Eva Eger, who is now a psychologist in California, states:

It took me 40 years. I can't erase the experience, but I can integrate it, come to terms with it. In Auschwitz I learned to become compassionate and forgiving.

You must be strong to forgive. Forgiveness is not condoning or excusing.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with justice. Forgiving is a selfish act to free yourself from being controlled by your past (p. 238).

Siebert (1996) states that even the most horrible experiences can be dealt with so they do not ruin your life. It is possible by working to overcome emotional trauma you may develop a better, stronger version of yourself.

Forgiveness involves letting go of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to wrongdoing and may also include responding positively toward the offender (Rye & Pargament, 2002). Forgiveness is not forgetting (Smedes, 1996) or condoning the offender's behavior (Veenstra, 1992). Forgiveness can cause improvements in mood and an overall sense of well-being. Forgiveness of others also reduces feelings of anger and depression. Forgiveness may decrease rumination (mulling over hurtful thoughts continually) and provides individuals with a new way to think about their circumstances. A large percentage of individuals recruited from church-based divorce recovery groups believe that forgiveness is extremely important for emotional healing following divorce (Rye, Flock, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004).

### **Long-Term Effects**

The long-term effects of divorce for mid-life women can be both positive and negative depending on the circumstances of the individual and their motivation to make the best of a difficult situation. Women in Wallerstein's (1986) longitudinal study who were over 40 at the time of the marital rupture, appear to be socially and psychologically disadvantaged. At the 10-year mark, many felt lonely and rejected and were living in economic, social and psychological conditions well below that which they had achieved during their marriage. Contrary to previous assumptions, the capacity to replace relationships which have failed is not a viable option for many of these women. Loneliness and unresolved feelings of anger are continuing major psychological issues (Wallerstein, 1986).

Bevino & Sharkin (2003) reported that 64% of female participants in their study identified "changes in self and/or new opportunities for growth" as a positive consequence of divorce (p. 91). This study suggests that divorce, like other forms of trauma, may provide the individual with an opportunity to find meaning and facilitate adjustment. Finding meaning was found to be an important variable in positive divorce adjustment (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003).

Strengthening resilience through adversity is often a positive outcome of the divorce experience. "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger" (Nietzsche), is often an expression used by people enduring adversity. Quinney and Fouts (2003) state that the increase in resilience gained may have long-term effects for facing future adversities encountered by individuals that are a part of life-span development. Seibert

(1996) states that the survivor personality feels “fully and totally responsible for making things work out well in a crisis” (p. 195). It is possible, that by working to overcome the trauma of divorce, mid-life women can become better, stronger versions of themselves.

Other benefits achieved by women after divorce include increased spirituality and a personal growth. Nathanson (1995) reported that the divorce experience caused women to question their faith and beliefs. It ultimately strengthened and refined their belief in God and they sought Him more in their distress. The women reported that they learned forgiveness and became more accepting. They also found that forgiveness of the ex-spouse led to improved well-being (Rye, et al., 2004).

Nathanson (1995) also reported that for the women in the study, divorce facilitated personal growth and development and a redefining of their goals and values for the future. Marks (1996) states that divorced women report advantages to single status such as personal autonomy and higher levels of personal growth.

Other positive outcomes from divorce include closer relationships with children and friends. In a study of divorced women in their 60's, a number of the respondents stated that they had a more satisfying relationship with their children subsequent to the breakup of their marriages than had been the case previously (Weingarten, 1988). In addition to better relations with children, mid-life women who are divorced often find comfort in new friendships with other women. In the “couples” world, a newly uncoupled woman feels the need to find other people with whom to share her time and companionship, this is usually another woman in similar circumstances. These

friendships will often develop into stronger relationships than the woman had in her previously married years (Hayes & Anderson, 1993).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Method**

The qualitative, in-depth, multiple case study approach was used to investigate how mid-life women made the transition from long-term marriage to single hood. According to Yin (1989), a case study is an intensive investigation of a single unit, and is the most appropriate research design when: (1) the researcher wants to answer the questions “how” or “why”; (2) the investigator has little control over the events being studied, and: (3) the focus of the research is on contemporary issues within a real-life context.

#### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. They met the following criteria: (1) the participants were seven mid-life women (ages 40-65) who had experienced divorce after a long-term marriage of twenty years or more; (2) the subjects had been divorced for a minimum of 5 years which gave them a clearer perspective on the long-term effects of divorce. The participants were recruited by networking through friends and casual acquaintances.

#### **Instruments**

The human instrument was the primary instrument used in this study. The principal investigator served as the main device for gathering data. Emphasis focused on the investigator’s adaptability and discipline in order that the inquiry operated



effectively. The human instrument: (1) collects responses and provides clarification; (2) uses a holistic context when gathering data; (3) interacts with the participants and the situation to guide the discussion; (4) provides a summary and explanation of respondent's statements; (5) provides an analysis of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Procedures**

The data for this study was collected in face-to-face interviews conducted in the homes of the individuals or in private locations such as offices of the participants or the researcher. Initial interviews were conducted using a list of topics that included: family of origin, parent's marriage, expectations for marriage, problem areas in the marriage, losses from divorce, coping strategies, adjustments and positive and negatives outcomes from the divorce. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed after the interviews. The initial interviews lasted from one to two hours.

During the first interview, participants were asked to "draw their feelings" before the divorce, during the divorce, and after the divorce. Through this exercise, it was hoped that the participants would reconnect with their emotional state at the specified times during the divorce process. They were encouraged to talk about what they were drawing to give further insight into their emotional state.

After the first interview, the data was transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was reviewed for missing information or gaps that needed further explanation. Informal follow-up interviews were used as needed to fill in the gaps and as clarification or member checks. These interviews were conducted by phone or in person. The participants were also asked if they wanted to clarify or elaborate on anything from the

previous interview. After the follow-up interviews were completed and transcribed, the data was analyzed and a list of emergent themes was compiled.

### **Analysis of Data**

The holistic-content approach (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) was the primary method used to analyze the narratives related by the seven women in this study. This method seemed to lend itself to the individual case study method better than the constant comparative method of data analysis. In the constant comparative method, units of data are identified and unitized and categories with similar properties are established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The constant comparative method breaks down important sequenced material into bits and pieces. While useful for making general statements across many subjects, category-centered approaches eliminate the sequential and structural features that are hallmarks of narrative. Narrative analysis highlights the sequential and structural features in which the narrator responds. In narratives, the events are meaningful because of their placement within the text. Therefore, breaking them into categorical components could lead to a loss of valuable meaning in terms of research goals (Reissman, 2008).

The Holistic-Content Perspective (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) , involves reading the narrative several times until a pattern emerges; putting global impressions of the case into writing; deciding on foci or themes in the content; and tracking themes throughout the narrative and noting conclusions. During the interview process, the researcher and participant jointly constructed the narrative. Open-ended questioning was used to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers to general

statements. The participants were allowed the time to speak and develop their stories in their own voice.

After the interview data was collected and transcribed, each story was read several times to identify themes within each story. These themes were given titles which identified the general idea of the theme. After each story was treated in this manner, themes from all participants were compared and contrasted. Themes that were common among all seven women's stories were selected for discussion and analysis.

Paul Bohannon's (1970) "Six Stations of Divorce" were used in analyzing the divorce adjustment process. Each participant's story included experiences which mirrored the six stations of divorce as explained by Bohannon (1970). These stations included the emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community, and psychic divorces. Stanley Hagemeyer (1986) identified two additional losses from divorce that were considered for analysis; these are loss of the dream and loss of physical accessibility. These frameworks were used to compare and contrast the experiences of the seven women in this study.

Visual interpretation was another method used to fully develop the findings of the study. Having the participants draw their feelings was a technique used to investigate the emotional states of the participants at various times during the divorce process. Words are only one form of communication; other forms such as drawings, gesture, and body movements precede words (Reissman, 2008). By having the participants create images of their experience, and tell how they were feeling at the time, their stories took on greater depths of emotion.

As in word-based methods, reading an image closely and responding to the details is essential to visual narrative analysis. Gillian Rose (2001) identified three sites for visual analysis; Reissman (2008) described these as: the story of the production of the image, the image itself, and how it is read by different audiences. The production of the image includes how and when the image was made and identities of image-maker and recipient. Analysis of the image itself includes asking what the story suggests, what it includes, how component parts are arranged, and use of color. The third focus is on the “audiencing” process – responses of different viewers, stories viewers may bring to an image, written text that guides viewing, and other issues related to reception.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “The basic relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?” To answer this question, the authors identify four factors that are needed for findings to be considered trustworthy. These include truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Truth value is maintaining that the study was carried out in a way that the findings are considered to be credible. Applicability refers to whether the findings will be applicable in other contexts. Consistency refers to whether the findings would be replicated with the same or similar subjects in the same or similar context. And neutrality refers to the degree that the findings may have been influenced by the researcher. These components were addressed in this study by applying the following

criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### *Credibility*

Credibility was established by using triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and keeping a reflexive journal and field notes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulation was achieved by comparing factors in each participant's story to the responses of the others. Individually, the drawings were also used to compare the narratives to the story told by the drawing. Triangulation was also achieved by review and advice from my professor during the research process. Peer debriefing was used during the follow-up interviews which occurred at two different times after the initial interview. Member checks were used when an unusual piece of information was received. When this occurred, the other respondents were questioned to see if they had similar feelings or experiences.

A reflexive journal was kept during the process to document decisions and insights as they occurred. This journal included field notes which were taken during and after the interviews. The field notes included descriptions of observations, such as the physical setting, participant's behavior, and the interviewer's feelings and reactions to the interview experience (Patton, 1990).

### *Transferability*

Judgments of transferability depend on a sufficient knowledge base so that the individual contemplating application in another setting could make the needed comparison of similarity. To establish transferability, thick description and purposeful

sampling were used in this study. Thick description includes a thorough description of the context or setting in which the inquiry took place and with which the inquiry was concerned (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants who fit the criteria of age, gender, and circumstances. Since the study concerned mid-life women's experiences after long-term marriage, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate choice.

### *Dependability*

Dependability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), can be determined by using a metaphorical audit. Similar to a fiscal audit, the dependability audit consists of examining two parts: the process and the product. In the present study, the process can be documented by examining the audio tapes, the transcripts of the tapes, and the field notes and reflexive journal. In addition, the dependability audit was conducted by looking at the process of who was interviewed; what questions were asked; and what interpretations were made. The product includes the transcripts, the written reports of the findings, the drawings, and the written analysis. These documents are all available for external checks. Dependability also includes the premise that if the study were replicated with similar participants in a similar situation, the results would yield similar findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It can be hypothesized, since the seven women in the present study had similar narratives and themes, other women in the same circumstances would have responses which would mirror those in this study.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability is the naturalistic researcher's term for objectivity. Objectivity removes the emphasis from the investigator and places it on the data themselves. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, pg. 300), "The issue is no longer the investigator's characteristics, but the characteristics of the data: Are they confirmable?" The major technique for establishing confirmability is the confirmability audit. The confirmability audit is similar to the dependability audit because it examines the raw data, field notes, audio tapes, transcripts and final products. Two other techniques, triangulation and the keeping of a reflexive journal are also included in the confirmability audit (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, the audit trail is rich enough that outside sources can attest to the finding that the results are not biased, but supported by the data.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS: THEIR STORIES

According to Jerome Bruner, “Stories are surely not innocent: they always have a message, most often so well-concealed that even the teller knows not what ax he may be grinding” (Bruner, 2002). The idea that narratives contain a message, often concealed is apparent in the stories of the seven women who shared their life experiences in this study. Each story concludes with a visual interpretation of drawings created by the participant which provide a different perspective on their experience. Creating a picture or drawing of an event is a technique used in art therapy. This method is used by counselors to delve into parts of the “self” that the client is unable to put into words. A more complete description of this process is found in Chapter III. Each individual story, while different from the others, contains a thread of similarity. Each woman faced challenges and heartache and suffered losses both in their family life and their personal self-worth. Each woman also found a well-spring of resilience from which to draw strength. These are their stories and this is my story.

#### **Marilyn - My Story**

*Married 31 Years; Divorced 6 Years; Married 7 Years*

“Stressful times are, by their very nature, disruptive. They rarely take place without some degree of pain and are accompanied by risk that we may not pass through them successfully” (Flach, 2004). Divorce was the last thing that I thought would ever happen to me. I was a Christian and I married a Christian; not just any Christian, but a



member of the Church of Christ, whose members feel that marriage is a covenant with God. My husband and his family were devoted to the church. And our family attended church “every time the doors were open”. I also majored in Home Economics Education and studied marriage and family relations so that I would be a good wife and mother. I believed that the only people who got divorced were wives who did not take care of their husbands and children or who “let themselves go.” It happened anyway, and I saw it coming, but could not do anything to stop it. I was devastated. I did not know if I would survive.

According to Flach (2004), “it is disruption, and most commonly a period of dysfunction that often constitutes a truly healthy response to meaningful stress.” If that is the case, I definitely had a healthy response to stress, because I was severely depressed for a period of years. My world turned upside down; I felt that I had lost everything that I had worked so hard to build. My dreams of a happy family were destroyed and I really did not know what my future would hold.

I always expected to have a happy family. In those days, divorce was not very common. Everyone just “stayed married” no matter what problems they had and that is what I expected to happen in my life. My parents stayed together even though they had problems. On the whole, they had a happy marriage.

I was supposed to be my daddy’s “boy”. Two girls had been born previously. The first daughter died a few days after her birth and a second daughter was born several years later. Daddy hoped that the third time would be a charm. I was his third daughter and even though I was not the boy he wanted, he still thought I was great. He was my

biggest hero and my biggest fan. He always told me how smart I was and that I could do anything I wanted to do in life.

Everyone said that I looked like my dad. He had red hair and freckles which I hated as a kid. As I grew older, I learned to accept my “auburn” hair and even enjoyed being different to some extent.

My daddy was a hard worker and always provided for us. We lived in a nice home in San Antonio. My daddy was able to buy both of his daughters a car when we graduated from high school and send us to college. I took advantage of the college education, but my sister only went for one semester and then got married.

Since my daddy was such a good provider, I sort of took it “for granted” that husbands would be good providers, especially if they had a college education. My expectations for my husband were formed from all of the great qualities of my own daddy and the other qualities that I hoped to find in my future husband’s family. These expectations, even though not totally conscious, caused a degree of difficulty in my marriage, because I never felt that they were met by my husband.

My parents were married for 50 years until my mother died. My mother had health problems and mental problems which plagued the marriage. My daddy was a saint and took care of her through everything. He was a good husband and a good father, but he did not attend church with us. This was something I looked for in a husband. I met my husband while we were in high school. His family attended church together and I started going to church with them. His family seemed like the “perfect family” and I assumed we would have a family like that when we married.

The way people behave before marriage is not always an indicator of the way that person will behave after the vows are spoken. This was true in my case. He had been very sweet and considerate while we were dating, but after we married, he became uncaring and selfish. Actually, even our plans for a mini-honeymoon should have given me a clue. I was attending Texas Tech at the time and I needed to take one class in summer school in order to graduate the next May. So, even though our wedding was in June, we had only the week-end for our honeymoon because of school. We got married in San Antonio, and I wanted to stay at a nice hotel in Kerrville on our wedding night. Instead, he chose “The Ranch Motel” in Fredricksburg, which was not nearly as nice as the one I had chosen. We also went to a rodeo the next night where he won the Bull Riding. We spent that night in the car because we were too tired to make the drive to Lubbock. I had to be back in school on Monday morning. So, the first few days of our married life were a predictor of how the marriage would be: his needs and wants would always be more important than mine.

As a Christian wife, I felt that I should be in submission to my husband. I also thought that when you loved someone, you just accepted certain things and looked for the good instead of the bad. So I worked very hard at accepting things.

As a child, I always liked to be “in charge.” I guess I was a born leader. I joined organizations and was “President of this” and “Captain of that” in high school. So, my personality was not one to be subservient or enjoy being bossed around. While we were dating, we did not have power struggles, but after the marriage things changed. During the first year we had problems with my husband doing things to “show me who was

boss.” It was a shock because he had been so sweet until we were married. It was about 10 years later that I learned that he thought he had to “take control” so I wouldn’t rule him. This was a problem all of our lives.

We moved about 10 times in the first 5 years of our marriage, which caused disruption and dissatisfaction on my part because I wanted a settled home life. Moving caused me to always feel like I was not in a stable or settled situation. The reason we moved so often was because he could not be satisfied with any job. He did not like people telling him what to do and therefore, had problems getting along with any boss or any type of job situation. But, after the children came, we moved less often. We had two boys and we lived on ranches and in small towns.

He always wanted the children to be loyal to him more than to me. He would tell me that I was making a sissy out of my youngest son. If my youngest tried to take up for me, he would make fun of him and my oldest son would also side with his dad. So, my youngest had to keep quiet out of self-preservation.

My husband loved to tease and make fun of people. He made fun of me and called me “fat” when I weighed less than any weight chart said I should weigh. He always said that he was “just kidding”, but I knew that this was his way of keeping me down. He liked to be in a one-up position.

I always felt that many of his issues were caused by the fact that he was a short man. He was about 5 feet 8 inches tall and I was 5 feet 5 inches tall. He weighed about 150 pounds and I weighed about 135. I know he did not want me to outweigh him or

look larger than he did, so I worked very hard to keep my weight down. But, he was still critical of my weight even when I weighed 15 pounds less than he did.

I always worked because money was an issue for us. Because of work, I was able to feel confident and self-sufficient at work. I was a teacher and I had my own business, a dancing school. At home, I usually gave in to whatever my husband wanted to do. One thing I always wanted to do was get a master's degree. He was always opposed to that. He said, "You need to be here for the kids." So, I did not try to go to graduate school while the children were at home. We also lived in a remote area where it would have required a long drive to a graduate school.

After my youngest son graduated from high school, we moved to a different area because my husband's business as a horse trainer was deteriorating. He had gone to work for a horse ranch and we had been there one day when he had to have emergency surgery. After several days of sitting at the hospital while he was recovering, I drove over to a nearby university to check out the requirements for graduate school. He felt that I should have stayed by his side and not left for something like that. This caused a rift in our relationship.

Moving "again" also caused me to enter into a depressive episode. The depression started before we moved, because our financial situation was bleak. We always had more bills than money to pay them and I felt that he could have done better, but was selfish about what he was willing to do to resolve the problem. When we first married, I tried to convince him to go to vet school or something so he could have a job that was satisfying and also would provide a good income. His father was a lawyer

and worked for a large bank and I tried to get him to consider something like that. Instead he just wanted to be a ranch manager and later work as a horse trainer. I always felt like he put his horses and his interests ahead of what was good for our family.

After the last move, we had several traumatic events that led to a very stressful year. He went from being his own boss to working for someone. The second day we were there, he had emergency surgery. Our oldest son was getting married to a wonderful girl whose father did not want her to marry our son and our youngest had just started college. We went from owning our own home and 80 acres to living in a trailer house on someone else's property. All of these things added together caused him to feel like a failure and since I was depressed, I had a hard time also.

I knew we were having difficulties, but we had weathered other problems before and had come through them, so I assumed that things would work out. He had never been unfaithful, to my knowledge, and I had not been unfaithful to him. As Christians, we both knew that we had vowed to be faithful to each other. We had been married 29 years and even though there were tensions in the marriage, I thought that our love for each other and our children would be stronger than any problems that we were having at the moment.

It was during this time that he began spending time with a woman who was a neighbor and 16 years younger. While I was at work, he would ride horses and she would come over and ride with him. He began having feelings for her that I could see developing, but could not stop. She left her husband and set her sights on him.

I could see the attraction developing between my husband and this woman because she called him several times a day to “ask for his advice.” His message to me was “she needs our help.” I could see that he cared more about her needs than my need to have a loyal husband.

I was devastated. I saw the relationship developing before my eyes and he kept denying his feelings. I even moved out for a night to show my displeasure, but she and her daughter moved in and even slept in my bed. I came home because I did not want to encourage her in this behavior. She was divorcing her husband and used my husband to “help” her. I thought that he would get tired of her because she was so “phony”. She buttered him up and told him how wonderful he was. I guess he needed that. I knew all of his faults and had put up with all the moving and not ever having any money. She did not have a clue!

Giving up on a long term marriage was not something I could do easily. I confronted my husband and asked him to stop seeing her. He moved out. He stayed gone for two weeks and then moved back in and slept in a separate bedroom. We went to see a marriage counselor several times. He was not sure if he wanted to stay married. In fact, I knew he did not want to stay married to me.

I loved him and he was the father of my children. I thought his Christian values would kick in and he would change his mind. So, I kept holding on to my faith in God and hoping that God would save my marriage.

This limbo period went on for about a year. I would not recommend this to anyone. There was no making up and no breaking up. This was the most traumatic part

of the whole thing. Finally I told him that I didn't fear anything except that this limbo would go on for the rest of our lives and I couldn't live that way. After about a year of living in separate bedrooms, he decided to get a divorce. I moved out and got an apartment in town.

I was alone in an apartment. I had to learn to be autonomous. I married when I was 19 years old. I left my daddy's house and went to my husband's house. I had never lived alone in my life. I was catapulted from living in my own home with my family nearby (my son and his wife lived next door), to living alone in an apartment with no one around who cared if I lived or died.

My children were in a difficult position during this time. They loved both of us, and were trying to keep a relationship with their dad, even though they did not approve of what he was doing. Since he kept the house and the land, my oldest son and his wife still lived next door to him. My youngest was in college, but when he came home, he went to his dad's place. I was not doing well emotionally and in fact was severely depressed. So, the boys really did not know what to do when they were with me. Like healthy males everywhere, they shunned "sick" people. I was definitely "sick." I had a very hard time with what I perceived as their abandonment of me.

"Resilience is a strength most of us can develop with thought and practice" (Flach, 2004). I was forced to become autonomous and to do that I had to develop resilience. I had no one to count on but myself and God. My faith had sustained me up to this point and it continued to support me as I struggled to survive the loneliness and emotional turmoil. In Flach's (2004) book, *Resilience*, he states:



Doctors can no longer afford to dismiss religious faith as spurious and irrelevant.

In medical schools across the country, there has been a concerted effort to introduce courses about understanding and enlisting patient's religious beliefs on behalf of their health and recovery from disease. Faith finally seems to have won its deserved recognition as one of humankind's most valuable gifts (pg. xxi).

My old life consisted of doing everything for my husband and children. I attended school events where my children were participating and I attended horse shows where my husband was performing. My whole life was tied up with their activities. When the marriage ended, I was sort of "at loose ends." I did not really know what I liked to do because I had spent my whole life following my husband's interests.

I did not know how to be single. A few friends from my school took me under their wing and helped me fill my time. One teacher friend encouraged me to be in a play with her. This was something that I had enjoyed when I was a high school student, but never thought I would do again as an adult. It was certainly different and I enjoyed it. She also planned a camping trip for "the girls." These were things I would not have done if I had been with my husband.

Attending graduate school was a method of coping during this time. Taking classes in counseling while living through the disruption caused by divorce helped me focus on something other than my problems. Learning about psychotherapy and all of the theories of counseling helped me see where some of our problems started. One thing I learned from my studies was that "you can only change yourself, you cannot change other people."

Journaling was another method of coping during this time. I wrote about what happened and about how I felt. I was so hurt and in such grief, that I thought that anything could happen to me. I hoped that someday I would be able to look back from the future, when I wasn't so devastated, and see how far I had come.

Work was my saving grace during the worst of the emotional upheaval. Work was how I got through the days. While I was in front of my class, teaching, I could forget about what was happening. I showed my students lots of movies that year, while I sat in the dark and prayed.

From January to May, I stayed in my job as a teacher living alone in an apartment. I was finishing my master's in counseling. I knew I had to do something, to get myself out of a toxic situation. I lived in fear of seeing my husband with the other woman, which happened occasionally. I decided that I had to move away.

Moving to a new location was a difficult decision, but one that turned out to be the best thing I could have done. I thought about moving back to San Antonio to be near my Dad, but I had too many memories of our dating years and family times with both sets of parents. I wanted to start over in a new place where I had no memories. I also wanted to be near my children so that I could still be able to see them without traveling a long distance. I applied for jobs in the area using my new skills as a school counselor. When I was offered a counseling position near College Station, my decision was made.

One benefit of living in College Station was reconnecting with a former student from my time in west Texas. Marie lived in College Station with her husband who was a restaurant manager. While in high school, Marie had been in an abusive family

situation and she often confided in me about her problems at home. Now, it was my turn to seek comfort from her. Every day, I would leave school and go to her house to be with her. I spent my evenings with Marie and her children who were 6 months and 2 years old. I would arrive at her house after school and stay until time to go to bed. Since her husband worked nights, she was alone in the evenings and this situation was beneficial for both of us. She knew my children and my husband, so she was like an old family friend, even though she was only 30 years old. She became the daughter I never had and really helped me through this difficult time. We are still very close.

Another benefit of moving was finding a new church that had a singles group. In my previous church there was only one divorced woman and we did some things together, but we were not really very much alike. I longed for some true friends who were more “like me.” In my new church in College Station, I found a group of friends who were single and had been through similar situations. Finding others who knew how I was feeling was a great discovery. In fact, talking about our stories was the main source of healing that came from the singles group. The friends I made at that time are still my friends today.

It was these friends who helped me see that I had an opportunity to make a new life that would be one of my own choosing. We started doing things together like having picnics, going to parties, and going dancing. It was at one of these dances that I met my future husband.

When your husband leaves you for a younger woman, you feel that you are unattractive to men and no one will ever want you. Going out dancing and being asked

to dance was a great self-esteem booster for me. When Earl asked me to dance we realized that I knew his ex-wife, who worked at my new school. She had befriended me when I came to work there and told me that she had been widowed and divorced; so, she knew how I was feeling. We were even in a prayer group together. At one point, when I was very down, I said, "I would like to find someone who would love me and take care of me." She said, "You need my ex-husband." I said, "Well, where is he?" We laughed and I never expected to meet this person. I was not even sure that I would be interested in him because I thought she was a nice person, but was not sure we would be attracted to the same type of men.

When I met Earl, I realized who he was and my interest level certainly went up. As I had suspected, he wasn't really my type. I had been with a cowboy and Earl didn't look like a cowboy. He was a nice man, but I didn't feel any attraction at first. Since I wasn't officially divorced yet, I didn't want to date anyone, because I felt that it was wrong. So, we saw each other occasionally at dances and as time went by I started looking forward to seeing him.

After my divorce, we had our first real date and I enjoyed being with him. I was still grieving for my ex-husband and I did not want to get serious with anyone. We became great friends and spent a lot of time together. Being with someone who was kind and considerate was very healing. He had been through a divorce, too, so he knew how I felt. We had many things in common and many differences. I always worried about the differences and so it took us several years before we decided to get married. We have been married for 7 years and are very happy.

My husband has encouraged me all the way in my educational goals. He knew just what to say to get me motivated when my will to finish my Ph.D. would diminish. He has also supported all of my goals, such as building my dream house on Lake Limestone.

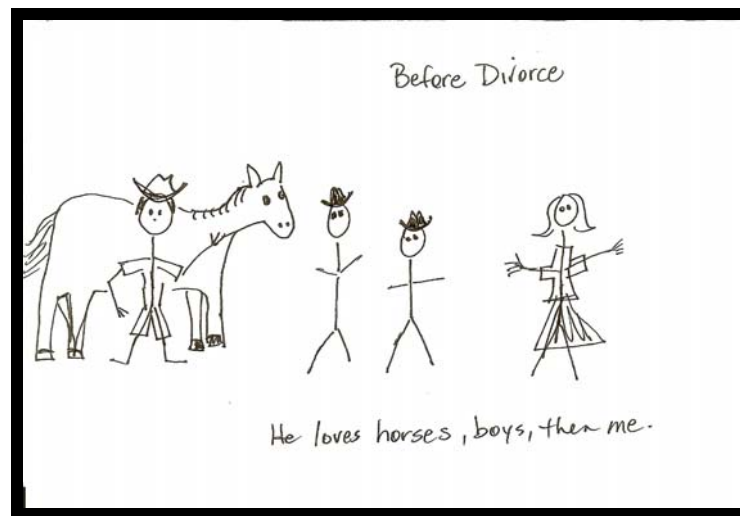
The difference in my old life and my new life is that I used to be married to someone who wanted the focus on him and his goals. My life now focuses on my goals and our mutual enjoyment of each other. (My husband says he's reached all of his goals, so we can work on mine.) He is happy to socialize with my friends and likes to travel with me. We are best friends and we enjoy each other's company, this is what was missing before.

My relationship with my children was strained during the divorce, but is now stronger since I am emotionally healthy and they are more mature. My children have gotten to know their dad without me in the picture. They are able to see his flaws and they know what actually happened during the divorce. My relationship with my children is good and I see them and the grandkids several times a year.

I am no longer angry or sorry about the divorce. I know that I am a stronger person because of it. My life now is of my own choosing and I know that I am blessed. I have learned that you should never trust completely in man. Man can betray you even if you know them well. Your trust should be in the Lord. Life is full of trials and thorns, but we can get through them if we have faith in God. If something is meant to be, God will bring it around. If not, your life will be better later. Just trust HIM!

Looking back at my life, the most important thing I learned was that I am strong and I am a survivor. I survived the most devastating event that I could have imagined. Even my husband's death would have been easier, because people grieve with you. When your husband leaves you; he is still in the world and he doesn't love you anymore. This is very hard for a faithful wife to understand.

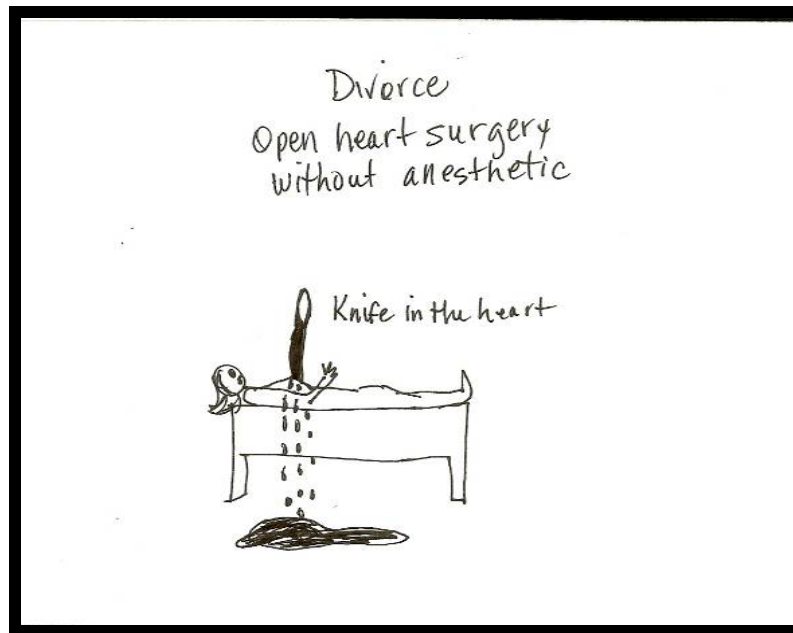
*Visual Interpretation*



*Figure 1. Marilyn's view of her marriage.*

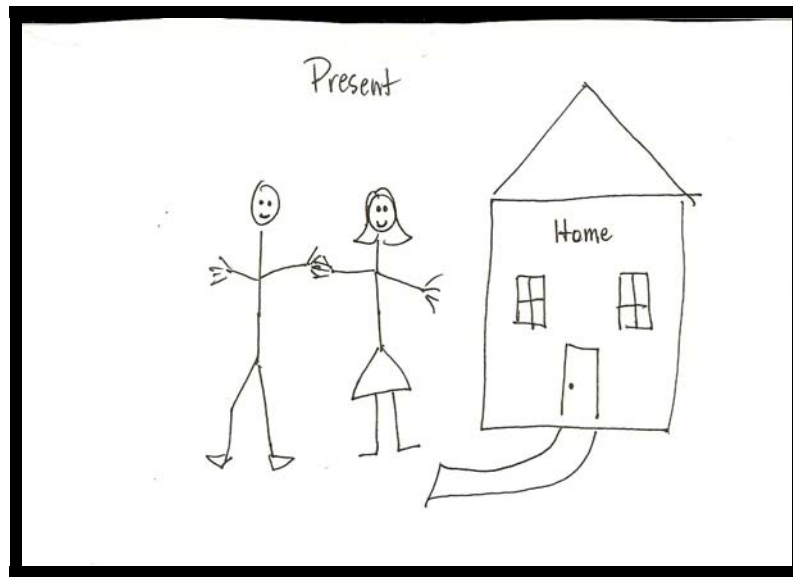
During the marriage, I always felt that my husband cared more about his horses than he did about me. In the picture, my husband is stroking the horse and standing close to the horse. I wrote that he loves his horses, then his boys, then me. This was how I felt. My oldest son is standing closest to his dad, my youngest is closer to me, but he is spaced farther from me than he is from his brother. This placement shows the

loyalties and expresses a dynamic within the family which I described as the boys and my husband “ganging up on me” (see Figure 1).



*Figure 2. Marilyn's feelings during the divorce.*

This drawing shows how hurt I was by the betrayal of my husband. The divorce was devastating to me and I often felt that I would rather have died than endure the heartache I felt. I described it as “a knife in the heart” or “open-heart surgery without anesthetic”. My head is up looking at my wound and my hands are poised above my chest, but I cannot prevent the assault from happening (see Figure 2).



*Figure 3. Marilyn's life in the present.*

Thirteen years after the divorce, I am happily married to a man who enjoys sharing activities with me. I am holding his hand standing beside our home. Recently, I was able to build a house which I designed and decorated. My husband enjoys doing things with me and is supportive of my educational goals. My life is now of my own choosing and I am smiling because I am happy (see Figure 3).



### **Louise's Story**

*Married 26 Years; Divorced 8 Years; Married 3 Years; Divorced 6 Years*

Today, Louise might be the poster girl for a happy, well-adjusted, baby-boom woman. She is successful in the business world, owns several homes and rental properties, has a circle of trusted friends and is devoted to her family. However, when I met her 14 years ago, she was a much different person. She had recently gone through a divorce after 26 years of marriage. She was confused, depressed, sad, and angry. Being in the same circumstances myself, I could definitely relate.

I met Louise at a “singles again” class which met at our church. As class members told our individual stories, we found comfort and developed friendships. We even started socializing outside of the class. Through the following weeks and months, we were able to help each other through the transition from thinking of ourselves as married to accepting our status as single.

Since I knew some of Louise's story, I asked if she would be my first subject. She graciously agreed and we met at her place of business. All of her employees were gone for the day, so we had the store to ourselves.

Louise is an attractive brunette with flashing eyes and a wonderful smile. She has an outgoing personality and has never met a stranger. She would win “Miss Congeniality” if she were in the Miss America pageant. These qualities serve her well in the business world where she is involved in sales and interior design. Wondering how she had developed such a winning personality, I asked her to describe her self-esteem as

a child. She told me about her grandmother's influence on her self-esteem in the following:

I had a lot of self-confidence and I got that from my grandmother. She always told me that I could do anything that I wanted to do...that I was wonderful. My parents also gave me those same affirmations. But truly, I gleaned that from my grandmother more than anybody else.

From the time she was a teenager, Louise had been a hard worker. She worked while in high school and instead of going to college, she chose to go straight to work, even though her parents could have paid for her to attend college. She earned a degree in interior design through "on-the-job training", which probably would be unheard of today. Marching to the beat of a different drummer has been her style. Her creativity and "can do" attitude have served her throughout her life; knowing this helps one understand why divorce was so traumatic to her.

Louise's dreams for her marriage were formed in childhood living with her mother and dad. She explained, "I was raised in a strict, Christian-based family... I felt that it (my marriage) would be parallel to the way I was raised."

She met her future husband while she was still in high school. They dated for year and then he started pushing for them to get married. She explained:

We dated a year, which would have been the latter part of my junior year. After the first year, he wanted to get married. I was seventeen at the time. He wanted us to get married before I graduated. We went to my parents and they said,

‘Absolutely not! You are not getting married!’ So we did not get married until I graduated. We married in November after I graduated.

During the first years of marriage, Louise was very happy with her marriage and her husband. She stated, “It was fabulous, I loved it. He was my best friend.” But, her husband’s penchant for straying was showing up as early as 1969 when he started meeting an old friend from high school while attending college. This was during the year following their marriage in November of 1968.

In 1974, while Louise was expecting their first child, her husband had an affair with a co-worker. A series of affairs followed in the years to come. As Louise became more successful in the business world, the marriage suffered. She explained:

My success in business and his lack of...being able to achieve some of the goals he would have liked to have made for himself [caused tension before the divorce]. I did not know this until much later, in counseling, but this was probably a huge contributing factor.

After each affair, Louise and her husband would reconcile and she would renew her hopes for a happy marriage. They had another child, a son, a few years later and she thought that their problems were behind them.

In the 1980’s, Louise became suspicious due to a late night phone call. She explained what happened in the following:

I knew that there was something going on, because of this phone call. Somebody wanted to meet him late at night. This was probably seven years prior to our actual divorce. And at that point in time was when I really learned about all the

affairs he had been having. There were about four or five at that point, if I remember correctly. Three of them had happened earlier in our marriage.

Anyway, with all the guilt and stuff, he wanted to come clean, and so for 7 years we actually put our marriage back together. I thought it was stronger.

Louise and her husband lived next door to her parents out in the country. Her Mother made comments about their lifestyle and especially their attendance at church which Louise felt was detrimental to their marriage. She explained:

My mother made comments that had to do with her religious belief structure.

Like, if you're not going to church on Wednesday nights or Sunday nights...she would constantly do the judgmental thing. It really wore on him and he did not like that.

Louise's husband wanted them to move away from her parents and away from all of the pressures involved with living next door to his in-laws. They eventually moved into town in the 1990's. By then, it was probably too late as Louise stated in the following:

When we made that move, I really thought it was going to be very helpful. I think his choices and decisions were already being formulated prior to that....so, he just wanted out...he wanted out.

Louise and her husband had been going to counseling for a period of time because of their marital problems. In Louise's estimation, things were going well and they were preparing to celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary the next day. She tells about what happened next in the following:

When he [my husband] woke up that morning he said, 'Well, I've been putting a lot of thought into this and I've decided I want to go ahead and file for divorce.'

It totally took the wind out of my sails, I had no clue. I thought things were going really good. He said, 'I need to get out of your life and Matthew's life [which is our son].' Matthew was 14 or 15 at the time. 'I need to get out of your life, because all I keep doing is messing it up.' And right before he left, he handed me a gift and said, 'I don't know if this is appropriate, but here is your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary gift.'

Louise was devastated. She thought things were going well. She said, "It completely took me by surprise."

When he left, her husband told her that he would still like to see her and take her to lunch. She told him,

No, if you've chosen to file for divorce that means it's over and you can't come back. You've got to make that decision, make sure that decision is what you want, because once it's done, then you've made your choice.

Louise began living "one day at a time" and tried to keep functioning for the sake of her son, who was still at home. At this time, her daughter was married and lived across the state. Louise found out that her daughter was being physically abused in her own marriage at this time. So, she was not only dealing with her own problems, but trying to be there for her children.

Louise viewed her husband as her “best friend” and she had lost him. She did not have very many other friends at that point in her life except her sister. She explained how hard it was to admit to her sister what was happening in the following:

I was so depressed all the time that I was not even able to tell her [my sister].

She knew that we were having problems, but I don’t know for sure at the beginning if she knew he had moved out. I couldn’t even pick up the phone to tell her that...I was in complete denial...I was not accepting that...it was not happening.

Her denial period lasted for quite some time. She thought, “OK, he’s going to call. He’s going to see he’s made a mistake. He’s going to want to put it back together.” She went through a period of stalking him. She would go places she knew he would be. She left notes on his car. She finally realized that this behavior did not work. She decided to force herself “into a better way of feeling.” She explained:

I made myself do what I did not want to do. I did not give in to depression...

Although I was probably on plenty of medication for it, so felt relief...[laughter].

But it was during that same time, that I had a wreck and had multiple disc fractures. So I was having health issues. I think the slowness of my healing was due to the depression as well.

Louise continued to see a counselor for her depression, for at least a year after her husband left. She explained:

I guess I was so grief-stricken and depressed and became so bitter about men in general, that he [the counselor] told me he didn’t think there was anything else he

could do for me. I had to end up doing something to pull myself up out of this and I think that had to do with my work and setting goals for being on my own.

Louise explained that her emotional state prevented her from focusing on important family issues: “I didn’t put as much effort into my children as I should have, which looking back, I didn’t realize at the time. I was so emotionally ill, that I did not know that.” The emotional trauma of divorce forces a person to concentrate on trying to normalize feelings of loss. Often this effort causes a person to neglect other areas which, in other circumstances, would be of high priority.

The effects of divorce on the children are always an area of concern for parents. Louise looked for support from her children and may feel that she counted on them too much. She explained:

My daughter was very supportive, very understanding. I feel like now, looking back, she was straddling the fence...not wanting to take sides. My greatest regret is the emotional issues I dumped on my son. He was 15 years old and he ended up stepping into the role of leader, the responsible person, my prayer warrior, and all of that. I did not know what I was doing to him, which may hopefully someday, be a positive thing. But it really affected him so it delayed some of his maturity, even if it sounded like he was being mature. I contribute some of his slowness to mature to my emotional strain.

Louise used her work to help her cope with the loss of her marriage. She began spending many hours a week working in order to keep her mind busy. She also attended church services and continued to rely on her faith to sustain her. During this time a

young woman who was dating her nephew moved in with her while she was attending college. She explained:

When she moved in, I didn't really want to spend a lot of time talking to her, but she had her own issues and her own story; so I think there was a healing process for both of us. She'd listen to me and I'd listen to her. That probably helped some. And I tried to bring some focus back into my son and his friendships, and that probably helped a little bit, too. But business opportunities also kept me focused on just plowing ahead and accepting the fact that if I had to do it, I had to do it on my own. So, that's what I did.

Support from her family was offered, but Louise did not really want her parents' help. She stated, "They wanted to rescue me, but, I did not want to be rescued. I told them they did not understand, and they didn't."

In 1995, a couple at her church started a singles class because there were quite a few people that were going through divorce or were widowed. She explained:

We had a group of people who were 'alone again' and that's when my healing actually started...developing relationships outside of the family...hearing other people's stories...and realizing that I would never trade with anybody else. I knew what I was doing with mine, but I could not help anybody else. But hearing other people's stories made me realize that I wasn't as alone as I had been feeling.



Talking with people in the singles class helped Louise see that there were two sides to the divorce issue. One gentleman, in particular, helped her see a different point of view, as she shared in the following:

There was one gentleman, who was also alone, but he was on the other side of the fence in the divorce. He's the one who did the leaving. And, so, it helped me to develop a friendship with him to help me understand my ex-husband. Why would someone want to leave? So, hearing his story made me start taking some sense of responsibility for myself and not doing all the blaming just on him. So, I guess you could say I had an 'enlightenment.' I started looking at the relationship for the first time as two-sided. I saw that some of my issues were difficult for my husband to live up to. So this was probably my first time of healing and moving forward.

Louise was able to move forward after a few years in the singles class. She dated several men, but was not serious about any of them until 1999. Then a gentleman who was going through a divorce after 25 years of marriage came to church. He was a member of the same church and was looking for support and someone to validate him. Louise had been through a similar experience and became his friend and confidante. After his divorce was final, Louise and John decided to get married. It had been less than six months since they started dating. Louise explained her quick decision with the following:

It wasn't a rebound, because it was a lot of years later. It was optimism. It was total optimism and feeling that ...he's a Christian, I'm a Christian and we can work everything out.

This marriage had problems from the start. John decided that he wanted to go to technical school in another town. So, Louise supported him while he attended school and he commuted back home on week-ends. This was during the first year after they married. He also decided that they needed counseling as a couple, but the counselor noted that he was the one who needed counseling. Louise and John facilitated several divorce recovery seminars for people going through divorce. These seminars seemed to highlight more problems for them as a couple.

After three and a half years, they decided to divorce. Louise had been the major bread-winner for the couple. During the divorce, they decided that he would pay her for her part of their assets but she did not have everything written in the divorce decree. So after one or two payments, he decided not to pay her any more. Her lawyer told her that it would cost almost as much to fight him in court. So she gave up and chalked it up to experience.

After her divorce from John, Louise was not nearly as torn up as she was from her first divorce. She was probably just angry. The first divorce brought the "loss of the dream" of living into old age with the father of her children. The second divorce was not nearly so traumatic. It was a failure of sorts, but mostly it was a relief. John had mental and emotional problems that were not apparent during their short courtship. When they divorced, she felt relieved.

Once again, Louise looked to her work for solace and focus. Luckily, she had not sold her business as John had wanted her to do. And, she had not sold her house in town when they bought property in the country. So, she was able to continue with her career and move back into her home.

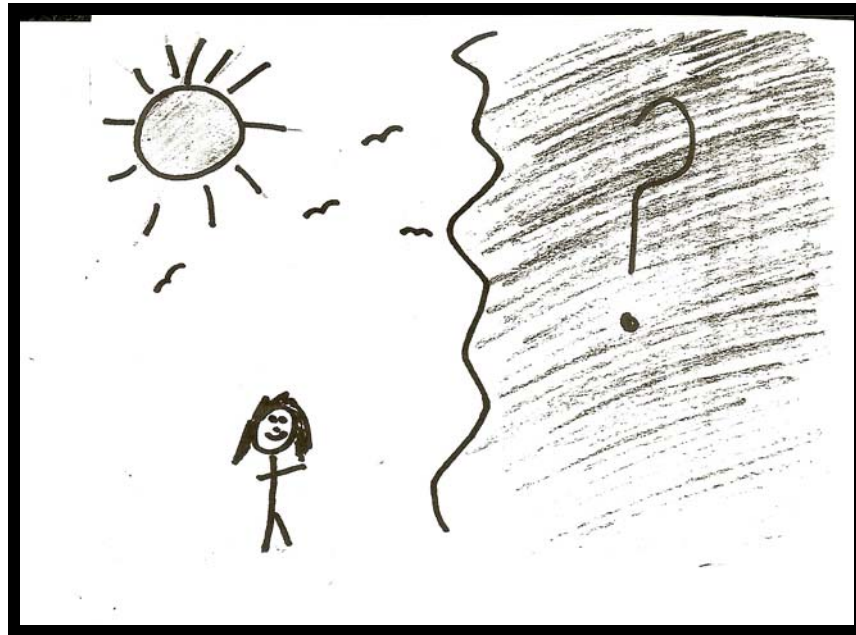
According to Flach (2004), there is a close connection between creativity and our ability to deal with stress. Louise used her creativity as therapy throughout her stressful years. She is involved in creative pursuits in her work. She also enjoys landscaping and decorating at home. She has remodeled and decorated several homes during this time. This creative ability has served her well in the traumatic events of this decade.

Another blessing for Louise has been a renewed relationship with her first husband. He never married and had taken care of his parents for several years until they passed away. Louise invited him to join her and the children on holidays and they were able to become friends again. In the last few years he had moved to another town and while going to work, he had an accident and was hospitalized with a head injury. At first, they were not sure if he would live. When he regained consciousness, he had brain damage and needed therapy. Louise and her daughter moved him to a nursing facility in the area and Louise visited him there. While in the nursing home, he had another seizure and died. Before he died, Louise felt that they had found a new relationship with each other. She shared the following, “We were back together, emotionally; we were. And that’s big, real big. Most people don’t have that joy. So the rest of my story is pure joy.”

“The best is yet to come” is the philosophy that helped Louise survive and thrive after the events of her divorce, remarriage and divorce. Louise explained:

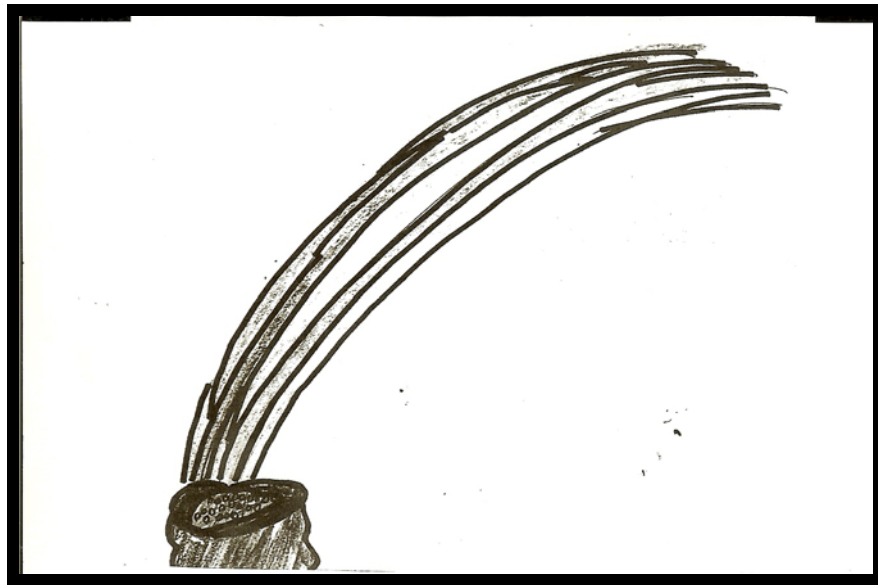
You have to adopt that philosophy in order to survive. But the best is yet to come and is still coming. You do survive it, you grow from it, you become stronger for it, although you don’t know it at the time. With the help of God, you can survive anything. The most important thing, which has carried me through this whole ordeal, twice, was my relationship with God. And I do attribute that to having a close earthly relationship with my father here. Then I was able to relate very strongly with my heavenly father.

Louise’s story is one of innocence lost. She married her high school sweetheart and expected to “live happily ever after.” Her only preparation for marriage was watching her mother and father, who had a traditional marriage that stayed together until the death of her mother. Even though her husband was unfaithful, she continued to forgive him and strive to keep her marriage together. When the marriage ended, she was devastated. Through a period of years and enormous personal growth, Louise has overcome her losses and gained wisdom and strength.

*Visual Interpretation*

*Figure 4.* Louise's feelings before and during the divorce.

The left side of the drawing is how Louise perceived her marriage. She knew that they had problems, but she believed that everything was getting better. The fact that she is alone in the picture, may signify that she was “alone” in her belief that everything was “sunshine and birds singing” when in reality it was not that way. The right side of the drawing is blackness and a question mark. She stated, “It went from complete joy and happiness, to complete blackness...not believing it...just a big question mark.” This portion shows the devastation that occurred when her husband told her he wanted a divorce. She was “in the dark” and did not know what would happen to her (see Figure 4).



*Figure 5.* Louise's life in the present.

This drawing pictures Louise's life as it is now. She explained, "My previous picture was birds in the air and sunshine and now it's the rainbow of promise and actually the pot of gold, because the Lord has blessed me...and I'm talking blessed me huge!" Louise is living a full life and has developed a successful business which has brought financial rewards and security. She is not pictured in this drawing or in the previous drawing on the right side. Whether this has symbolic meaning is not known. One explanation of her absence in the drawings could be that she felt like things were not in her control; other forces were acting without her agency. In the previous drawing, her husband was in control of what was happening to her and in this drawing, God is in control (see Figure 5).

## **Jeanna's Story**

### *Married 32 Years; Divorced 16 Years*

Jeanna was my friend from elementary school through high school. As with so many relationships, we lost touch after we graduated and did not meet again until we were both single again. I was living in an apartment in College Station, still grieving and trying to survive, when one night I got a phone call, it was Jeanna. Somehow she had found my phone number and called me. It was like a miracle. She told me that she was divorced. She did not know that I was getting a divorce until that time. We talked for awhile and then agreed to get together when I came to San Antonio.

The next time I was in San Antonio to see my dad, I went to Jeanna's place of business. She managed a furniture store and worked for another friend from high school and her husband. She told me about her divorce and really gave me a pep talk about how to overcome the hurt from divorce. She was very encouraging and I thought, "If she can get over it, so can I."

In high school, we always thought of Jeanna as a "big girl." She was not fat, just tall and big boned. She had black hair and dark eyes and was very striking, especially when she laughed. She was so much fun to be with. I remember dancing "the polka" with her in her living room and laughing our heads off when we were young.

I interviewed Jeanna at her home in the country near San Antonio. This is the same home that she shared with her husband prior to their divorce. Her daughter and family live next door. We sat at her kitchen table drinking iced tea. Her hair was silver

and her frame was somewhat more filled out, but she was still very striking and still had that wonderful laugh. I have never known anyone who did not “love” Jeanna.

Jeanna’s story is one of a stay-at-home mom whose life’s work consisted of taking care of her husband and three young children. She was totally dependent on her husband for financial support as well as emotional support. In the 1960’s when Jeanna married, this was a common practice. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this seems almost archaic, but this was the norm for pre-baby boom and baby boom women. One thing Jeanna now preaches to her children and grandchildren is: “Always have some way to make a living.”

Jeanna’s parents were married for 50 years and she describes their marriage as “relatively happy”. She explained, “Oh, they fussed, but they always loved each other. Every night they would tell each other they loved each other.”

Like many young women of the baby boom generation, Jeanna expected her husband to be like her daddy. She stated: “Daddy would have done anything for mamma. I wanted my husband to be a really good husband and dad. I wanted us to have a really good family life, but due to his infidelity, this was not the case.”

Jeanna saw her role as the mother and wife. She stated:

I had a big job, I raised a family and had a good home for my children and for my husband, but I didn’t work out [outside the home]. I even made his lunches.

And he would tell you, and he’s told other people, that I was a great wife.

Jeanna’s husband was a good provider and she had no vocational skills. She explains the situation as follows:



My husband was a very good provider. He always took care of us...one thing I can say about him...he would wear holey shoes and make sure his kids had good stuff.

Jeanna started her marriage with high hopes. She dreamed of a happy marriage and a great family life. But after only a few years, her dreams were shattered when her husband suggested she move back to their home town with their three-year-old child. He convinced her it would be the best thing by telling her that “it was too hard on her to travel with him for his job.” Jeanna said, “I should have known.”

When asked if she knew what was going on with her husband, Jeanna stated:

I did not know what was going on. His brother was the one who finally told me, because the girl kept calling his parents’ house. And my daughter was three, so I was twenty-two.

Jeanna felt that the main problems in their marriage started at this time due to his unfaithfulness. When asked about the “emotional divorce”, Jeanna stated:

It started happening early, the third year of marriage....it happened, and I should not have taken it then. But, one sin I have is jealousy. But not now, as soon as I got rid of him, I quit being jealous. It’s amazing. I don’t have to be jealous.

Infidelity was an ongoing issue in Jeanna’s marriage. When asked about the number of times he was unfaithful, Jeanna replied: “I know of four. He is not one to just go out and have a fling...he falls in love. Its ego...he has to have that...they love him. That would have been easier... the other way (speaking of a one night stand).”

Other tensions in the marriage were caused by his drinking and their different

values and morals. Jeanna explained:

He did lots of drinking...beer drinking. I guess I just wanted things so different and if I tried to say anything, he would react. We fought a lot. And if I tried to have an opinion...you know...in some marriages...the husband...I didn't have an opinion.

Jeanna continued to hope that she could hold her marriage together through all of her husband's affairs. "I always dreamed big, I always thought it would be better, but it wasn't." For twenty years, Jeanna accepted the fact that her husband would do too much "running around and drinking." But he always came home to her. She explained, "He wanted his cake and eat it, too. He liked the fact that I was his good 'business and family wife'." He had her for his business events and family functions and he had his "other women" on the side. And she put up with it.

Finally in 1984, Jeanna wanted out and they divorced. Jeanna's husband managed to keep financial control of her following the first divorce by paying her house payment and providing a monthly allowance. She stated:

In the first divorce, we had that new home...he not only gave me a thousand a month, which he had to pay and he paid the house note... because he had an ulterior motive: 'As long as I keep her, then I can come back.' You see...and he had me STILL because of the financial thing.

He also had her due to his emotional control over her, as she explained, "He would come home every week-end and make sure I didn't have a life." Jeanna started

dating another gentleman during that time and when her ex-husband found out about it, he threatened to “hurt” the other man. So, Jeanna stopped seeing him.

For the next seven years, Jeanna allowed her husband to come home to her even though they were divorced “on paper.” She stated, “We never were apart really.” While they were living together and were legally divorced she did not think he had any affairs. She spoke of their relationship in the following:

We were like Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton; we couldn’t live together and we couldn’t live without each other. And one thing I was addicted to was the hoopla. I was addicted to the drama of the fussing and the loving.

In 1991, they married again. Jeanna felt that her dream of growing old with her husband would be a reality. She explained:

I had this dream of us growing old together...[us] and our grandchildren. Dolly Parton wrote a song called *Rockin’ Years*...and it was like, I thought that was us. We played it when we got married the second time, out here in the yard. And I just ...I had a dream...plus, I was with him from the bottom up...financially... and its not that I need his money...but I stuck by him through thick and thin, and I got nothing out of it. In the first divorce, I did, I got \$25,000. But, he came back to me and we spent it together. So we couldn’t live apart ...and we couldn’t live together. We had a hard time, both of us.

They remarried in June of 1991 and by September, he had started another affair with a woman who was 29 years younger than him. Jeanna did not find out about it until March of the following year. She decided to get a divorce. She explained,

There was so much tension. I was so tired from all that was happening. And I know he was, too. We both had got down to where we looked like skeletons.

He wanted me... he wanted her. And then when she got pregnant, that did it.

In October of 1992, Jeanna's divorce was final. Even though Jeanna initiated the divorce, in her heart of hearts she still hoped for a miracle.

I thought, I really thought he would quit all he had to do and come back. And in fact, down at the courthouse that day [of the divorce], I went to San Fernando Cathedral and prayed on my knees and I thought, 'Please let something happen!' And of course it didn't.

In December, when the baby came, Jeanna's ex-husband asked her to come with him to the hospital and look at the baby, because he did not believe it was his. He told Jeanna that the baby was the girl's ex-husband's child. When Jeanna saw the baby, she thought it looked Hispanic and the girl's ex-husband was Hispanic. But after DNA tests were done, the baby proved to be her husband's. Jeanna was devastated, again.

Jeanna had divorced him in October of 1992 and the baby was born in December of 1992. This second marriage had lasted 16 months. But, this was not the end of their relationship. Breaking away from emotional dependence and developing financial independence were extremely difficult tasks for Jeanna. Throughout her marriages and divorces, her husband returned again and again. She explained:

He kept coming back home and I'd allow it. I always thought...and he said, 'It's gonna be better, I promise.' It was very hard for me to totally let go. I guess

because we had gone back so many times...I thought this last divorce wouldn't last...He'll come back again.

During this time she even took care of the child that her husband had with the other woman. She told of her hope to mend their marriage by being good to the child.

I was so silly. I thought, If I'm good to this baby girl, [and she {the child} cried when she'd leave me and say 'I want my Jeanna'], I thought that would make him and I closer. It should have...and that was very hard. The divorce was very hard...both of them.

The final breakup was extremely difficult for Jeanna because her husband kept telling her he loved her. She explained:

I was physically sick. I was pitiful. I guess I felt like such a failure. But, still he came back. And finally in '94, November...was the last...that was it. I couldn't do it anymore. I told him, 'I think I'm going to have a heart attack. I've got to stop this.'

Losing a mate has been compared to losing a limb. You learn to get along without it, but the loss is always with you. Jeanna still feels the loss today as she explains in the following:

The divorce was very hard...both of them. And finally, when I let go, it took a few years...and there's even times now, that something happens and I think...I think about that...

Jeanna blamed herself for the demise of her marriage. She asked, “What did I do wrong to cause this? Because I kept thinking it was my fault.” When she looked back at her marriage, she remembered the following:

There were times when he’d say. ‘You haven’t saved enough for us.’ But, he didn’t realize, because he didn’t handle the money, that things were expensive with the kids, you had to make choices. I lost such self-esteem because I kept thinking it was my fault. Did I not save enough money? Was I not attentive enough? Am I not sexy enough...especially when there’s another woman involved?

Even after several affairs and a divorce, Jeanna still felt it was *her* effort that could save the marriage. She kept thinking, “My marriage is going to be better. I’ll do better, I’ll do better.” This refrain is reminiscent of the “battered wife syndrome” where the batterer convinces the battered wife that “she made him beat her”. So often, women cannot see what is happening until they get away from the situation. Now Jeanna tells other women, “Live for yourself. Don’t blame yourself. Know that you can make it and not be dependent on your spouse.”

After the second divorce Jeanna’s children were very supportive. She explained how her children reacted to the circumstances of the divorce in the following:

They were for me [in the divorce]...because of it being the way it was [his having a child with another woman who was the age of his daughters]. If we would have fallen out of love and just could not have lived together anymore, but not that way. My kids were very against that. They didn’t want their mama hurt,

especially my youngest; she really stood up for me. After the divorce, they didn't want me to be by myself. My ex-husband expected me to be here at all times...and if things went wrong with 'sweetie pie' then he wanted me to be there to talk on the porch. He wanted me to be his friend. The day that I told him that we didn't do that anymore, he kissed me on the cheek and said, 'I just lost my best friend'. I told him to not come back.

Jeanna's relationship with her children and her grandchildren is the most important thing in her life now. She lives next door to her youngest daughter and sees her grandchildren every day. She explains, "It's amazing, they are a joy to my life. They love me unconditionally. Family is very important to me." Even though Jeanna did not get to have that dream of the *Rockin' Years*, she has enjoyed most of the dream with her children and grandchildren around her.

Jeanna received the house, where she now lives, in the divorce settlement, but since she did not have a job, she was forced to put it up for sale. She did not have money for food or the necessities of life. She lived on credit cards for awhile. Not only was she in debt, but she would not leave the house because of severe depression. She describes what happened to help her start the recovery process in the following:

It took one of my best friends to get me out of the house and quit mourning....it was like a miracle. She had a birthday party for me out here and invited certain people. One of my old high school friends, Sharron, was one of them. She asked my friend why I had my place up for sale. My friend told her that I couldn't pay for it, because I was too depressed to work. And I wasn't going to give it to my

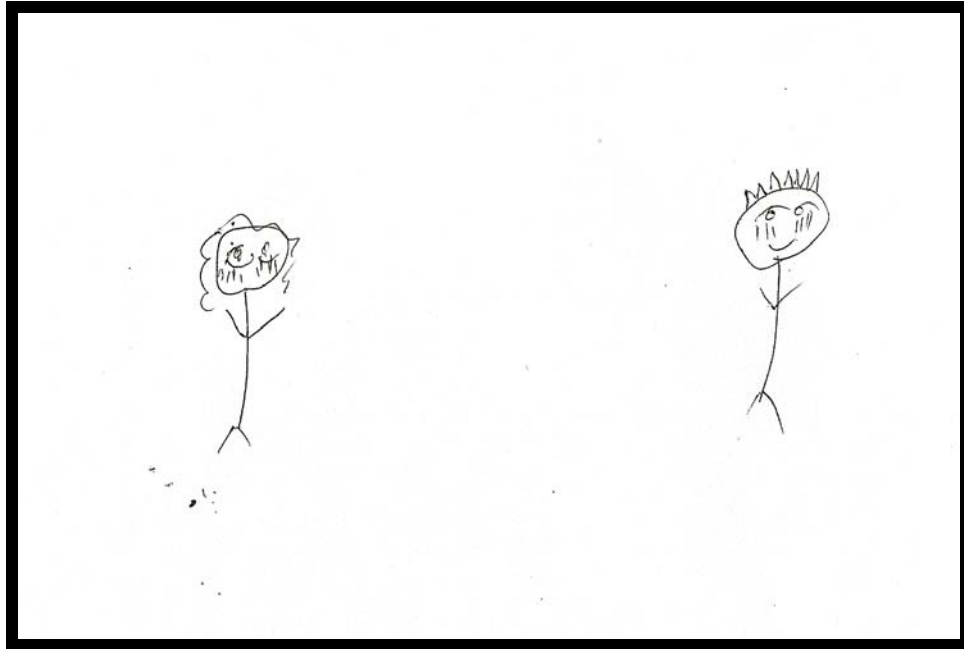
ex and his girlfriend to live in. Sharron said, you know what, Jeanna's place is so nice, we don't want her to give that up, and we need a manager. Do you think she'd be interested? It was like God was working...that was a miracle to me. And I thank the Lord for that because he gave me back my sanity. He gave me back my self-esteem, my autonomy, and I did support myself.

Even though it was hard for Jeanna to let go of her marriage and the dependence she felt toward her husband, she gained self-confidence as she became more self-sufficient. She explained, "The more independent I got, the easier it was. Oh, my gosh, that first paycheck, I was so thrilled. And I could support myself."

Jeanna's philosophy of life has changed from one of a dependent woman who looked to her husband for all of her basic needs, to one of an independent woman who can take care of her own needs. She states, "I have taught myself one thing, I can live my life and it doesn't have to include a man. And I had never, ever, lived alone until I was 51 years old." Her advice to other women is, "Always have a way to make a living, a way to support yourself. Because when you are independent, it's a wonderful thing."

Her self-esteem has risen since the divorce and evident in the following statement: "I am a great person and it doesn't have to involve my ex-husband. I always thought I was his wife; I had to be this special person. Well, you know what, I'm a good person, and it doesn't have a thing to do with him."



*Visual Interpretation*

*Figure 6.* Jeanna's view of her life during the divorce.

In this drawing Jeanna drew her feelings at her final divorce. She remembered the sadness. She stated, "Still sad...after the divorce, very sad...so much sadness...so much sadness." Jeanna and her husband are crying. She stated that he could not decide who he wanted; he wanted Jeanna and the other woman. Finally, Jeanna told him to stay away. She told him, "I think I'm going to have a heart attack. I've got to stop this." They are separated by a large space which signifies their inability to come back together permanently (see Figure 6).



Figure 7. Jeanna's life in the present.

Jeanna places herself in the top left corner. Her long-time male companion (JW) is next to her which shows his significant role. She places her grown children in the top row next to JW, showing their importance in her life. The children are arranged from oldest to youngest. In the bottom row are the grandchildren. As Jeanna drew the picture, she chuckled because just thinking about her children and grandchildren made her happy. She commented that she made her son (DT) smaller than her oldest daughter (KV). She stated that she always put her children in birth order. Her oldest daughter is smaller in stature, but she is the oldest and strongest, so she is drawn larger. Jeanna described her picture in the following: "They are a joy to my life. They love me unconditionally. Family is very important to me." Jeanna's life is happy and she has the happy, strong family life she always wanted (see Figure 7).

### **Bobbi's Story**

*Married 23 Years; Divorced 18 Years; Married 16 Years*

Bobbi is a neighbor of mine at Lake Limestone. She and her husband introduced themselves to us one day while my husband and I were clearing brush on my newly purchased lake lots. As we were talking, my husband mentioned that it was my property and it would be my house. Of course that made an impression and later, I told Bobbi that I was divorced and I wanted to own this house in “my own name.” Since my dad had left me an inheritance, I could pay for most of it without any other funds. Bobbi related that she was also divorced and as we compared notes on our “ex-husbands,” I realized that her story would add another dimension to my research.

On first meeting Bobbi, my impression was that she could command a board room or a professional organization. She is an attractive blond with a tall, graceful physique. Her speech and mannerisms speak of someone who has met the public in her career. I met her at her home at the lake and was surprised that it was rather rustic with cedar-paneled walls and dining room furniture from the 1940's, painted orange. When she explained that she was an art major and had been a “hippie” in the 1960's, the unique furnishings seemed reasonable. She also explained that this lake cottage had been her present husband's before they married, thus the cedar-paneled walls.

Bobbi described her childhood personality as outgoing, optimistic, and mischievous. She explained what she meant by the following story:

Everybody in my family knows the liver story. I do not like liver, I can't stand to smell it, I don't want to have anything to do with it, plus, my mother was a

terrible cook [she looked around to see if her mother was there...she lives next door]. I had to sit at the table and couldn't do anything until I finished my plate and that was sometimes very, very late into the evening and I liked to go out and play after supper. One time we were having liver and everyone had left the table and I was still sitting there playing with this horrid meat on my plate. Everyone was in the other room, so I took off my shoes and socks and put the liver in my socks, put them back on my feet and put my shoes on and announced to the world my plate was done. I got to go out and play. And I buried my socks, liver and all in the garden. I did a lot of things like that.

Growing up, Bobbi's parents seemed to have a happy marriage. Her parents were married for 55 years before her father passed away. She explained her dreams for her future marriage in the following:

I really wanted a partner. I wanted someone who would meet me on equal terms. Instead of that I got continual competition. We taught a Sunday school class for young married couples. We came in one time and they had taken a picture of two bulls butting heads and they put it up on the wall...it was very obvious [that this was us].

In the beginning of their relationship, Bobbi and her husband shared interests and values. They both were involved in church activities. They both liked the arts and drama. They were married in the 1960's and she was a "flower child" with long hair. They did not care about money. While in college they had a "very meager lifestyle." Their income was limited, but it was not an issue because they were both "absolutely

crazy about each other.” As time went by and he started to learn how to make money that became “very important to him.”

Things started to go wrong shortly after their marriage. She explained:

I noticed that he had a temper. He put his fist through the wall when he was upset about something. He also pushed me around sometimes. One time I went to work with a black eye.

The birth of their first child also caused tension in the marriage. Bobbi related their problems after the birth of their son in the following:

The next year after we were married we had a child. And dreams started having to be set to the wayside because of responsibilities. And it wasn't all his fault, I was very headstrong and immature and selfish. I think it was just too much responsibility and we did not accept help. We both were very independent and self-sufficient. We did not accept help from our parents and not often from each other...I can do it...I can do it.

As time went by other issues became apparent in the marriage. Issues with their families arose because he did not like her family. Bobbi liked his parents, even though she described his mother as “extremely difficult to get along with.” Bobbi related that his mother was “just like him” [her husband]. But, she also stated, “I love her dearly and I cherish the times I have seen her in the past several years. She has a lot to do with where I am spiritually.”

Initially, they had the same values and goals, but as time went by, things changed due to his successful career as a sales trainer for a national company.

Over a period of years when we finally started earning some money [things changed]. He was in a profession where he got a lot of attention. He likes to be center stage, that's very important to him. That became more important to him than just about anything.

Conflicts over their children caused tension in the marriage. Bobbi explained the situation in the following:

My husband, I hate to say this, but my husband loved my second son very, very much. He had a sister that passed around the time he was born and my husband latched onto him. The other child just got left by the wayside. He [her firstborn child] is a wonderful, wonderful son. He just felt like he had to act out all the time just to get attention, whether it was negative or not. He would take negative rather than get nothing.

Bobbi shared an incident that occurred when her younger son was born. Her oldest child felt the loss of his place in the family as illustrated in the following;

When my youngest son was born, my oldest was 5. By that time, he had already lost favor with his dad. The new baby came and my mom was staying with us and she couldn't find him [the oldest son]. She looked around the house and she finally found him in the living room under the coffee table. She said, 'Come on out. What's the matter; what's the matter?' And he said, 'Everything's different except me!'

Throughout the marriage, her husband favored the youngest son. She stated, "It was very obvious to my sons, to me, and to other people." She did not fight with him

about it because she did not want to hurt the one that he did not favor or the one that was his favorite. Bobbi defended her oldest son by stating, “He was just a good kid, so I couldn’t understand. He [the oldest] was just like me.”

Another issue in the marriage was her husband’s constant criticism of everything she did. Bobbi described him as “a very domineering person.” He was very good at manipulating and would do things like telling her she had “bad breath” at church so “she should not talk to anyone.” When it came to her homemaking skills, she related this example:

I always thought that his help [around the house] was offered as a negative comment on how I was doing something. If he vacuumed the floor it was because he didn’t like the way I did it. He liked things a certain way. He liked his food cooked a certain way; if I didn’t cook it exactly that way, he would throw it in the trash can.

Bobbi was willing to accept her husband’s criticism and domineering ways in order to keep her marriage together and make a home for her children. They were “reasonably happy” most of the time and there were even times when the feeling of being “crazy about each other” would resurface. After about 16 years of marriage, things changed when her husband brought a younger woman into the picture and insisted that she be treated as “part of the family.”

This woman actually worked for Bobbi’s husband and he asked Bobbi to help her with her clothes and make-up. At one time he told Bobbi that this woman needed a “sack over her head” because of her looks. Bobbie related the details in the following:

She was his 'project', and he had to have a project. He wanted me to fix her make-up...her hair... she was a project. But she was also very co-dependent. She had never had a date in her life. She hero-worshipped him. I took her to every organization I belonged to, all my club meetings. She mirrored everything that we did.

For the next few years, the relationship with this woman and Bobbi's husband became stronger and harder to explain. He insisted that the woman go on vacations with their family. Bobbi protested and begged him to have a vacation with just their family, but he insisted that she be included. For the next 5 or 6 years Bobbi lived with the knowledge that there was "something going on," however, she did not want to divorce. She was focused on rearing her children and providing them a stable home life.

During this time, her husband was having health problems. These included severe asthma attacks and breathing problems. These caused "lots of trips to the emergency room." Bobbi realized that "a lot of that is triggered by anxiety or stress and when you have another life going on over here behind the scenes...[that causes stress]."

At one point, Bobbi decided to move out due to her husband's relationship with this woman. But she ended up coming back because he was in the hospital. She stated: "He was in the hospital and I just couldn't manage the job, the apartment, a house, and my son. So, I ended up going back." Her husband did not want her to leave. In fact, he suggested that they could all live together as one family...Bobbi, the other woman, and him. Bobbi did not agree to that proposal.



Due to the tensions in the home, Bobbi and her husband had separate bedrooms. She realized several years before the divorce that “he was gone.” She remembered one incident that crystallized her knowledge, as she explained,

We were in the laundry room and we were doing something. We were kneeling down and I reached over and kissed him. It was like kissing your brother. It was so, just an immediate realization that there was nothing there.

Bobbi and her husband moved to Texas shortly before the divorce. She explained: “He moved us cross country to a community property state right before we split up. We were in a state where I would have probably gotten a lot more. Not that I wanted it, but it was just the idea.” After the move, the other woman stayed behind. But it was not long before things changed, as Bobbi explained:

She called and cried all the time because we had moved. And then he brought her down for visits and then they would go off for ‘business trips’ together. I found something in a suitcase one time that I sent back to her with a little note. And she sent a note thanking me.

Bobbi finally had her fill of the situation and left. She was the one who actually initiated the divorce proceedings, but she stated that, “He was the one who divorced me. I ended up leaving because there was someone else.”

This was a very difficult time for Bobbi as she explained in the following:

The divorce only took 4 or 5 months. I didn’t have a breakdown, but I was so upset by it and how it all turned out that I didn’t contest anything...here, take it, its all yours. I was very close to my dad and my dad taught me ‘never be a

quitter'. To me, that [divorce] was just being a total failure, not just in my marriage, but also personally. So, that was just devastating. But the hardest thing was that my youngest son was still at home and he had to choose. His dad told him he had to choose between the two of us. He also told him, 'Well, you know that I'm sick.' He used the old 'sick card' and of course, he loved his dad and he decided to stay with his dad. But it was devastating, especially when you knew that someone else was waiting in the wings and was there fixing breakfast for your son and everything.

Bobbi's husband married the other woman 6 months after they divorced. Bobbi had grieved for her marriage for many years. She stated, "I knew years before I'd lost my husband, so I wasn't grieving the loss of him. I was grieving the loss of my son and the family unit."

During the divorce, Bobbi and her husband had agreed that the parent who had primary custody of their son would stay in the house. Their oldest son had already left home. She wanted her youngest son to "stay stable, stay in school and stay connected with his peer group." He had a wonderful peer group and bible study group, so she wanted him to keep all of these things. Since their son chose to stay with his father, her husband got the house. Bobbi was forced to move into an apartment. She moved about 7 or 8 miles away from her old neighborhood, as she explained, "We had a nice home. I couldn't afford the prices in my old neighborhood. They didn't have apartments in that neighborhood."

Even though the divorce lowered her standard of living, she was able to work and support herself. She had started to work when she thought that her husband was “extremely ill.” She thought she would lose him, and have to put her sons through college herself, or he would leave her and she would have to support herself. As it turned out, she was right. Her work became her “saving grace.” Working was her way to fill her time, but it was also challenging because she had to keep up a front, as she related in the following:

It was very difficult being in position where I had to deal with the public all the time. I was in marketing and it was really difficult because I would have to go in the break room and cry. I had a lot of people who were dependent on me and I was just a basket case. I was supposed to keep up a professional attitude with my secretary and everything. So it was very hard.

Bobbi turned to her church and friends in her Sunday school class for help and support during this period after the divorce. She explained:

The hardest part, especially after losing my son, was going home from church alone, because we have this *Leave It to Beaver*, June Cleaver mindset. When you came home from church you have this wonderful meal on the table and the family sits around...and that's the way it had been...it had always been that way. We had missionaries that came...a big family and then all of a sudden, I am all alone in a little apartment with nobody there. That was really hard. So, every Sunday, someone from Sunday school class either invited me to their house for dinner or invited me out to lunch. They were such a blessing.

Bobbi never had a lot of girlfriends prior to the divorce claiming that she could always converse better with men. But during this time, she became close friends with her son's best friend's mother. This woman was also in her Sunday school class. Bobbi felt that her biggest supporters were members of this Sunday school class.

Bobbi's youngest son was 14 at the time of the divorce and she continued to see him every week. She and her husband had joint custody, even though he lived with his dad. She picked him up for church every Sunday, which was stipulated in the divorce, and she was able to maintain a close connection with her son for his final years in high school. Another stipulation in the divorce was that her ex-husband had to stay in the area until their son turned 18. She stated, "The minute he turned 18, his dad moved out of state. I was already married and lived down here and my son had to live with some friends for the final semester."

In Bobbi's line of work, marketing, she was going out and seeing people quite often. She explained, "In my job it's just very common that you take people out to dinner and so I was always out and had people to do things with." She actually met her future husband through her career contacts. She traveled all over the state and met with 500 different agents. He was one of these agents. She explained their first meeting in this way:

When I first met him, I think it was when I was separated, and there were just so many stressful things going on. I walked into his office on sort of a cold call and I sat down and was talking with him. I could tell he was just being polite. He really did not have an interest at all in what I was trying to sell. I was up to here

with men at that time; I had had it. I had given him some literature and my card and after a while I just got tired of being patronized. So, I got up and took the material that I had laid on his desk and threw it in the trash and I said, "Thank you for your time." And I left. A year or so later he called me. Evidently he had taken my card out of the trash can.

Another way Bobbi filled her time during the aftermath of divorce was by taking on the responsibility of teaching a junior high girls Sunday school class. In addition to teaching their class, she invited the girls over on Saturdays to do crafts and other activities. Bobbi played the piano and guitar for the girls and they all enjoyed themselves.

Like so many other baby boom women, Bobbi lost the dream of keeping her "family unit" together. She explained,

I really didn't feel like I had lost the dream until I realized that I wouldn't have my son. I guess because the other rocking chair on the front porch would have been empty but the grandkids would have still come. And they still do when they can. But, it's so hard on them when they have to split their time especially when we're in two different states. One son is in Ohio, he's [her ex husband] in Indiana, and one son is still here.

Bobbi's outlook on life changed after the divorce. She was able to become her own person as she related in the following:

It [the divorce] was very freeing. I had never been able to hang a picture on the wall without someone coming behind me to straighten it. Or get dressed for

church without someone making a comment. I could do anything I wanted to. It was an unexpected benefit. I didn't want to go back, once I had the courage to leave.

Following the divorce, Bobbi changed her view of husband's roles and wife's roles in a marriage. As a Christian, Bobbie still believes that the husband should be the head of the household, but that does not mean he should be the "ruler" but should share control with his wife. Women should learn to take care of themselves financially, especially if they have children. Prior to going to work, she knew nothing about finances, as she shared in the following:

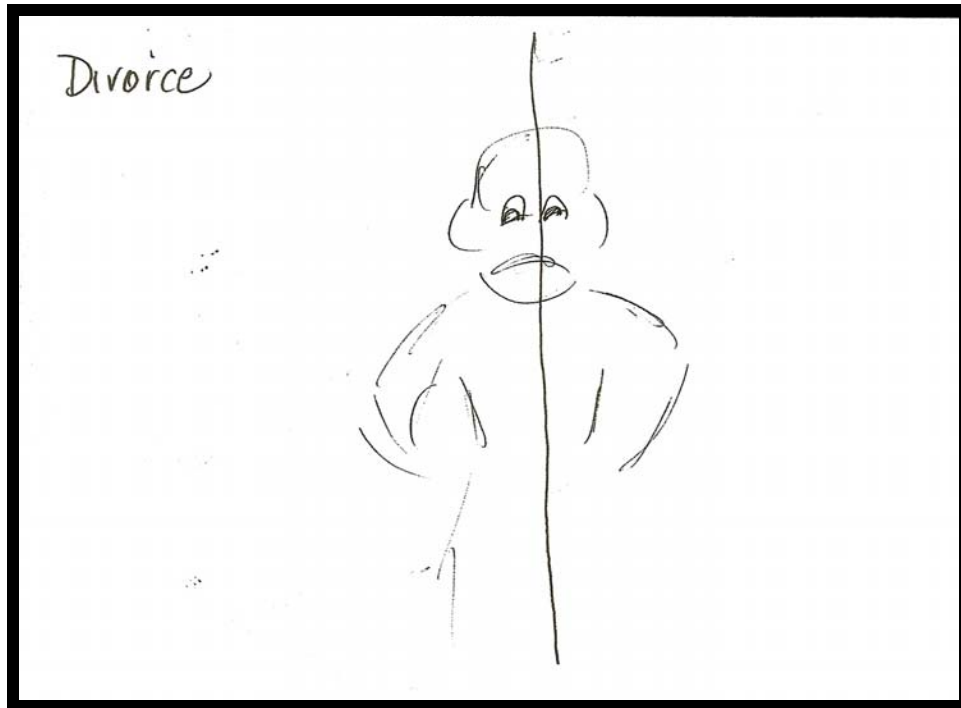
Fortunately the position I took before I was divorced gave me some insight into the business world. I had never even seen a checkbook before that. So, it's very important that you share responsibility, but at the same time be responsible for yourself. It's foolish and thoughtless of a man to keep financial information from his wife, especially if you have children. If something happens to him, she has no idea how to handle the finances and can't take care of the children.

Bobbi is happy now and has been married to her present husband for 16 years. She stated, "My life now is happy, but not without problems. I am just so grateful for my husband. He is kind and is a caregiver. And never in 16 years has he told me I had bad breath!"

*Visual Interpretation*

*Figure 8. Bobbi's view of her marriage.*

Bobbi's husband is shown in the drawing as standing on a pedestal with her down below with her hands raised in homage or praise. The circles are the heads of other people in the audience where he is speaking. She stated, "I think of him as always on a pedestal and me and everyone down below. That's him on the podium and everyone is telling him how wonderful he is." The picture is abstract and there are no facial expressions which may indicate the lack of emotion in their marriage, especially at the end. Their positions in the drawing mirror their positions in the marriage. He was the master and she was the subordinate. He was the star and she was the fan (see Figure 8).



*Figure 9.* Bobbi's expression of her son's dilemma during the divorce.

Instead of drawing how the divorce affected her, Bobbi drew how the divorce affected her youngest son. This tells a story in itself. Bobbi stated that for several years she had known that the marriage was over. She stayed in the home because she did not want to disrupt her children's lives. Finally, she could not take it anymore and moved out. She hated what that did to her son. She stated, "This is my son and he was pulled in half...and he was miserable." The drawing shows her son with an extremely sad face and a line splitting him in half. One half wanted to stay with her and the other half wanted to stay with his dad (see Figure 9).





*Figure 10.* Bobbi's life in the present.

As Bobbi drew the picture above, she shared the following:

You heal, you find happiness and there's always joy, but the pain of what a child went through, the pain of seeing your child suffer, that doesn't ever go away. It doesn't mean that you don't dearly love who you are married to and don't thank the Lord, day and night...but you still feel the hurt, the memory of the hurt.

Even though Bobbi remembered the hurt, she still sees her present as beautiful: the sun is shining, the birds are singing and the flowers are blooming. Her life in the present is happy and she is content, even with occasional hurtful memories (see Figure 10).

## **Shirley's Story**

### *Married 31 Years, Divorced 7 Years*

Shirley's story is different because she was the one who initiated the divorce. The one who is left is often the one who grieves the most following the divorce, but in Shirley's case, her grief occurred during the years prior to the divorce. After hearing her story, I understood that she wrestled with her decision for most of the thirty-one years she was married. Ever the eternal optimist, she kept hoping and praying that something would happen and things would be better. Finally, she made the decision herself.

Though her hair is gray, Shirley's skin is as smooth as a woman much younger than her 60 years. She is small in stature and tends to carry a little too much weight around the middle which has caused her to become diabetic. Her smile is a little crooked and her blue eyes sparkle, which add to the overall picture of a mischievous pixie. She is always ready with a funny story and a friendly smile.

I met Shirley through a mutual friend. As baby boom women who were divorced, we belonged to an elite group. We could relate to each other in ways that the "never divorced" would find difficult. After hearing parts of her story, I realized that her experience would add a new dimension to my study.

We met in Shirley's comfortable home in a suburb of Bryan, Texas. Shirley is an articulate story-teller and shared her experiences with candor and insight. She explained that many of her realizations about her marriage came through soul-searching before and after the divorce. She continues to question herself and wonders if she could have "tried harder."

Shirley was reared in a happy home with a mother who was extremely optimistic.

She explained:

I was raised by a mother who taught us that the glass is always half-full, not half empty. So, I had to be optimistic almost because that was the life we lived. We were taught to look for the good, not the bad. We were taught to be proud of what we do or don't do it at all. So, it never dawned on me to be any other way.

Her dreams and expectations for her marriage were to have a marriage like the one her parents had. This was not the type of marriage that her husband's parents had, as she related in the following:

I thought it [my marriage] would be like my mom and dad's. I would cook the meals and take care of my man. Mother treated Daddy like the king. My daddy loved my mother and treated her like a queen, too. So, I guess I assumed that the *Leave It to Beaver* family life I lived and saw on TV back in those days was what you had. And so when I came into a relationship that...that wasn't how my husband was raised...so, he didn't know.

Shirley met Henry at church while they were both in college. They dated for awhile and then broke up. Shirley's mother encouraged her to go out with him again because he was "a nice young man from a nice family."

When they first started dating, Shirley says that everyone asked her what she saw in him. She stated:

I saw something nobody else did. He was really an introvert, very quiet, raised in a very pessimistic home. We liked to go places and he treated me

marvelously. We would go out to dinner before every date...the whole nine yards. Then we would go home and we'd walk a couple of miles and just talk. Later, I realized that talk was cheap. Acting...putting your words into action, is harder. He talked about these grandiose dreams that he wanted to do. And, not necessarily get rich, but it just sounded like so much fun to do those things with him. We had a wonderful dating life.

Even at this early stage of dating, Shirley had some clues to her future husband's personality and temperament as she stated in the following:

He was an eternal pessimist. Anything that happened, he couldn't see good in it. He lived in fear of criticism. You don't do anything at all, that way you are not criticized.

An example of this was when he graduated from college and was looking for a job. She explained:

He had just graduated from Tech and was having a hard time finding a job...again because he was not going and looking, because that would have been criticism if he didn't get it. He would go home and he would come back the next day to see me and he would be so down because of his pessimistic mother. I spent all of my time saying, 'You're gonna get a job, and have you looked here, and you need to tell them da, da, da.' I tried to build it up and get excited. He would go home to his 'down-in-the-mouth' mother and she would say, 'Woe is us, you're not going to get a job because we're poor.' But it was a fun time,

because I guess I was doing that nurturing thing that I now see wasn't good either.

In 1971, the outgoing, nurturing Shirley married the introverted, pessimistic Henry. Opposites attract, just like magnets, but with people this is often a tragic combination. Things started to go wrong from the beginning. Shirley explained it this way:

Almost immediately he shut down, but I think that is sort of normal. Men think after they are married, the wooing stops and women are stupid enough to think it's gonna go on. Probably the dysfunction of my family was that nobody fought. I never saw my mother and daddy fight. My mother never yelled at anybody. So, that wasn't normal, but to me it was. So to get in the house and...we called what he did, the girls and I, we called it 'storming'. He would huff and puff and slam himself around the house when he got mad. And so, I learned in that first year what rejection felt like. And I also learned that I wasn't with somebody who cared about me. I want to know your inside...and I want to be able to read when you need a pat on the back or a kick in the butt. He didn't care, he didn't care at all.

Even though things seemed bleak at times, Shirley continued to be optimistic about her marriage. Having children was sort of understood before the marriage, but after the marriage he kept saying, "I don't know if I want to have kids, because I don't want to come home and you be washing diapers." She realized that he did not want to give up her "mothering of him" for the children. She recalled, "I wasn't really

pushing...we've gotta have a baby, we've gotta have a baby. It was just something we talked about. When my daughter was born, things got worse."

When their first daughter was born, Henry used this as an excuse to take himself out of the family situation either by working or going to graduate school. Shirley remembered, "He worked all the time. He was working on his masters, so, he would work in the daytime and then go back to work and do research at night. My daughter grew up really not knowing her dad."

One night, her husband tried to "take part" in the child care with disastrous results, as she explained in the following:

He came home and said, 'I'll bathe her.' It shocked me. I was a very routined mother. Well, he took her in to bathe her. She threw a fit and cried and turned blue because she was crying so hard. That was rejection! That ended his relationship with his first daughter...throughout their life. Right then I knew that something wasn't right, but I still wasn't convinced that I couldn't fix it. I just knew that I could make it right. It was years later that I realized that this is not working.

Another area of concern was what Shirley called his lack of "social skills."

Shirley was reared in a family where manners included greeting your guests in a friendly manner. Being polite and considerate of others was taken for granted. Henry lived by far different social beliefs, as she explained in the following:

People would walk in our house; he would not stand up; he would not speak; he

would just continue watching TV. If it was supper time, when it came time to eat, he would set up his TV tray and eat, no matter what everyone else was doing.

Since Henry was reared in a family so different from Shirley's family, it is predictable that there would be conflicts with the in-laws. Shirley explained their relationship in this way:

They didn't like me. They were just rude, he learned it all from his mother and daddy. They were very cold. When we were married for 10 years, we separated for a little while and at that point, their 'sort of dislike' became real dislike, because 'how dare you' suggest we think of changing things. I would go in and they would hug me, but it was like a wash rag. They would call when he was home for lunch so I didn't answer.

Ironically, now, even after the divorce, Shirley takes care of her ex-husband's parents who are in a nursing home. The nursing home calls *her* when they need something. Shirley explained, "To this day he can't take care of his mother and daddy because he 'has to work.' And he probably has 4 years of sick leave sitting there that he could be using."

Another area of difference was in their approach to career advancement. Henry, with his fear of rejection, stayed in the same job throughout his adult life. Shirley, on the other hand, changed jobs 7 times, always for advancement. She explained in the following:

He told me, 'I can't believe you change jobs so much, that's horrible [how bad

you are].’ And I’m thinking...me with 144 hours and no degree was making as much money as him with a Ph.D. I just wanted him to have more initiative.

Of deep concern for Shirley was Henry’s relationship with the children. When their oldest daughter was 6 years old, they went to counseling for her because she was having problems. Shirley explained what happened:

I will never forget, the lady looked at my husband and myself, with the girls right there and she said to me, ‘Do you love your husband?’ And I thought, ‘Should I be honest and help my daughter or do I lie and not sound so bad.’ And I chose to help my daughter, so I said, ‘I don’t know anymore.’ And her comment was, ‘Then the first thing we need to do is work on ya’ll, and I will be your counselor and help you through this, if you want. If you don’t want me, go somewhere.’ He wouldn’t go.

Henry would not go to counseling for their marriage at this time and when their marriage was in danger, he agreed to go, but was reluctant to open up and actually work on their issues. Shirley continued:

We went again about 10 years before the divorce, but he wouldn’t be honest. He would answer how he thought he should answer. And you can’t win that way. We also went to Marriage Encounter. One of our differences is that I can talk all day and he can’t talk at all. He can only put his feelings in writing. He’s also a scientific-brained personality. As long as we had a situation that was like the example they gave, he knew how to respond and what to do. But if it was out of that parameter, he couldn’t relate.



After 10 years of marriage, Shirley decided to separate from Henry. Prior to the separation, she made an all-out effort to “fix” their problems. She explained her efforts in the following;

I had gone through a stage where I wasn’t telling him or sharing with him what I needed. And I wasn’t doing enough for him and with him. So, I tried to send the girls off for overnights...have a romantic evening. His response was to turn on the TV. Then I tried talking and telling him I needed a friend and a lover...to be my most important person in my life. And he couldn’t...now that I look back, he couldn’t understand that. But, he didn’t connect, because the night I walked out and I walked out...the next time we talked was a week later. His comment was ‘I didn’t know it had gotten this bad.’ In my opinion I had cried out to him in a way that he had to have heard me, but he didn’t. So, I think that’s when I realized that I was fighting a battle that I didn’t know how to fight or how to win.

After the separation, Shirley told her mother that they were going to get back together. And her mother’s comment was, “Stop and think because there is a fine line between love and pity.” And Shirley admits that it probably was pity that caused her to go back to her husband. Shirley tried to sustain her marriage. She explained what happened in the following:

Promises were made, but things did not get better. We had long talks, and I would tell him what I needed. But, he had emotionally pulled away from me, too. When it was sex and there wasn’t love, it wasn’t lovemaking...it was

scheduled. Well, it's Wednesday night, I guess we will do this. So it wasn't enjoyable for either one of us.

As the years went by, the relationship grew progressively colder and more distant. Shirley accepted her marriage as it was, but was not happy with the situation. She knew this was not the marriage she had wanted or expected, but it was the marriage she had. She explained it this way:

Probably the last 10 years, I knew this wasn't what it ought to be, but I didn't want to tear the girls up. I really didn't have a reason [to divorce]; he didn't do anything. And, so, for probably the last 4 or 5 years, I prayed every day that God would show me the way to make it right or show me how to get out...because I really didn't think God wanted us to live as two strangers. By that point, it was a grunt in the morning to acknowledge we were awake and I would go to be early and he would watch TV or sleep in the recliner. I needed God's guidance, I didn't know what to pray for. And the last year, I ended up moving into a different room because I couldn't stand the turmoil of being in bed with a stranger...sharing a bathroom with a stranger. I was still praying that God would show me what to do.

Shirley continued to live in this emotionally cold environment for a total of 31 years of marriage. She looked for excuses to not go home at night. She would stay at the office and play solitaire instead of going home. By this time, the girls were teenagers and when they called to see when she would be home, she told them, "Oh I have just a little more work to do on this project and then I'll be home."

The crisis came one night when they had come home from a family outing. It was their daughter's birthday and they had gone out to eat. The girls had brought their boyfriends to the dinner and the group had returned to their house. Shirley explained what happened:

Now, divorce was on my mind constantly. It would kill me that we would do things as a family and he would be there in body, but not participate. So after we went out and came back to the house to have cake and let her open her presents, he turned on the TV and started watching the ballgame. I could tell that [his actions] hurt her. So, I reached over and turned off the TV and said, 'Can't we wait tonight?' He got mad and turned the TV back on. And we had our little party without him. After everybody left, he said, 'I'm going to bed.' I said, 'OK' and I sat up and I was praying, 'God, I can't do this anymore...I cannot do this...You've got to show me what you want me to do and if I'm going to have to do this for the rest of my life, show me how.' About that time, he walked back into the room, I don't know why and I looked at him and said, 'I can't take this anymore, I want a divorce.' Just like that...I had not planned it...it was a 'God moment.'

Her immediate reaction was 'I'm free.' After all the years of unhappiness and soul-searching, she had made the decision. Telling her girls was the next hurdle. She explained:

Their first reaction was complete shock. Probably nobody in the whole world expected this to happen. Complete shock...and they were cool to me. After

about a week, they came back and said, ‘Mom, now that we think about it, you’ve been through a lot and we know that.’ And so, I asked each of them, ‘If I could go back to your dad, would you want me to?’ And they said, ‘Heavenly days, no!’ I was so tense all the time...I was a bitch. So, the initial shock was unbelievable and I’ve had nothing but support ever since.

Shirley had to move out of a “lovely home.” She also lost the second income that she and her husband shared. But she stated that she “was always a go-getter” and so her financial status lost ground, but she was still able to support herself. Her greatest loss was in the emotional realm. She explained, “In think, in my heart, I still love the man I married. So the loss would be of *my love*.”

Living parallel lives with her husband in a “cold” marriage taught Shirley to fill her time with activities that would help her survive. During the marriage, she concentrated on her daughters, church and work. These activities continued to help her cope when she was no longer married. Her friends at church were a great comfort to her during her divorce and afterwards, as she related in the following:

I was real lucky because we belonged to a couples group at church. Since I was the one asking to leave and I felt that he needed some kind of outlet, I told him that I would change churches and he could keep going there. He decided to leave the church completely. Fortunately our friends loved us both and called and tried to be of comfort to him, and definitely were of comfort to me. He just didn’t know how to accept it.

Shirley also started dating after the divorce, but she was not interested in

getting serious. The gentleman she dated had recently lost his wife and he sort of took her under his wing. She realized that he wanted more as she explained:

His wife had been dead about three years. I thought he was honestly trying to help. He would call and say, 'I'm hungry for a chicken fried steak, want to go?'

And so I went. I never accepted that as a date. I didn't realize that he was roping me in.

Shirley ended that relationship and immersed herself in her kids and grandkids.

Shirley's advice for other women in a similar situation is, "Don't wait. I think my girls, maybe, would have had a happier life, too. But I thought I was doing the right thing. You can only try so long, if it's not going to fix, it's not going to fix."

Shirley's life now is "wonderful, but lonely." She describes her present situation in the following:

I think I've only realized I'm lonely in the past 6 months. And I keep saying, 'If God wants me to have somebody, He'll bring him...I've just got to be patient.

And I think I need to go through a 'lonely time' so I will realize that I want that.

In all my life I've never been lonely, that's a blessing.

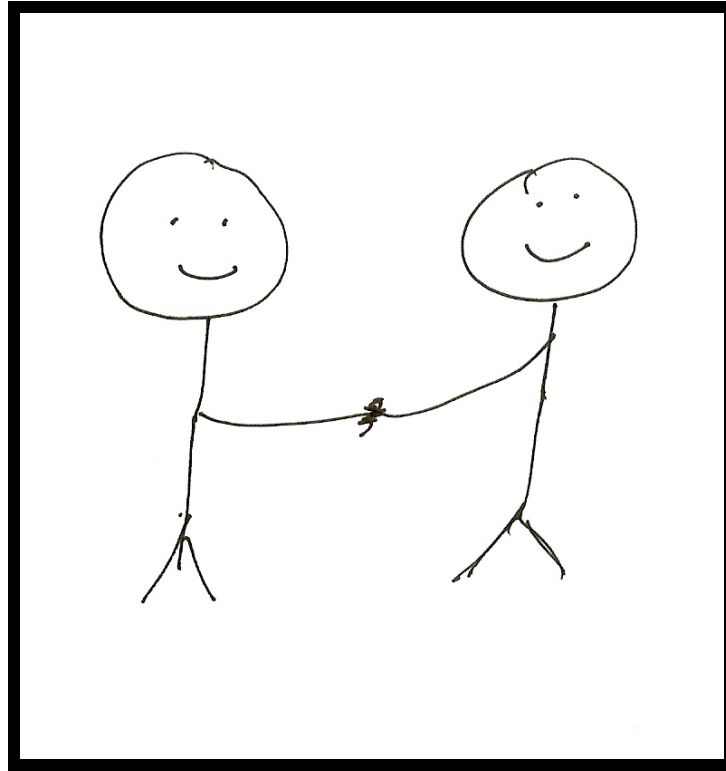
Shirley changed her outlook on life and her ideas about marriage from one of cynicism to one of hope. She explained her feelings as follows:

I was cynical for so many years. By that I mean, I thought nobody was really ever happily married. Marriage is never happy...people put on fronts, but they are not really happy. I thought that since I was putting on a front, so was everyone else. I even wondered if my parents were happy. I've learned that

happiness is measured in different ways. I thought a husband and children...the Beaver Cleaver life...was what everybody should have...and I'm happy now.

I've also learned that I can do it by myself. I did it a long time by myself and didn't realize it. Nothing really changed, except I don't have a 'body' here.

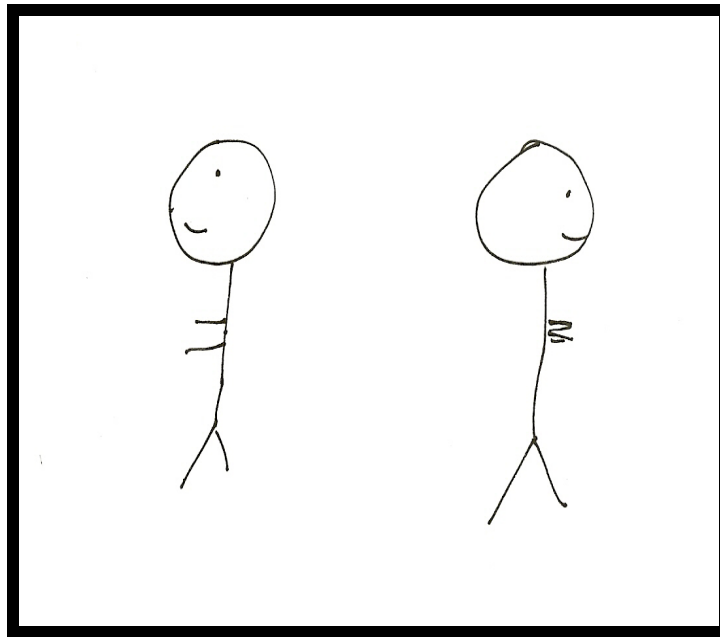
Shirley's struggle to "fix" her marriage lasted 31 years. Her religious beliefs limited her choices, since her husband did not do anything "bad enough" to warrant a divorce. Instead, Shirley lived in a cold, uninvolved marriage with a man who was in denial about their situation. His reaction when she brought the situation to a head by separating from him showed his detachment from any type of emotional relationship. He said he did not realize that things were so bad. Later, he said that Shirley was "his best friend" and he still loved her. Although the decision to divorce was difficult for Shirley, living alone is easier than living with someone who is physically present, but emotionally unavailable.

*Visual Interpretation*

*Figure 11.* Shirley's view of her marriage in the beginning.

In the beginning of their relationship Shirley felt that she saw something in him that no one else saw. Her husband had many plans and dreams and she thought it sounded like fun to do those things with him. Shirley described the drawing in the following: "Two people that are happy...but far apart...very long arms...at the beginning holding hands." So, even at the beginning they were far apart and they are not looking at each other. This may mean that they had different views of how their life together would unfold. She had a vision of the two of them working together toward his

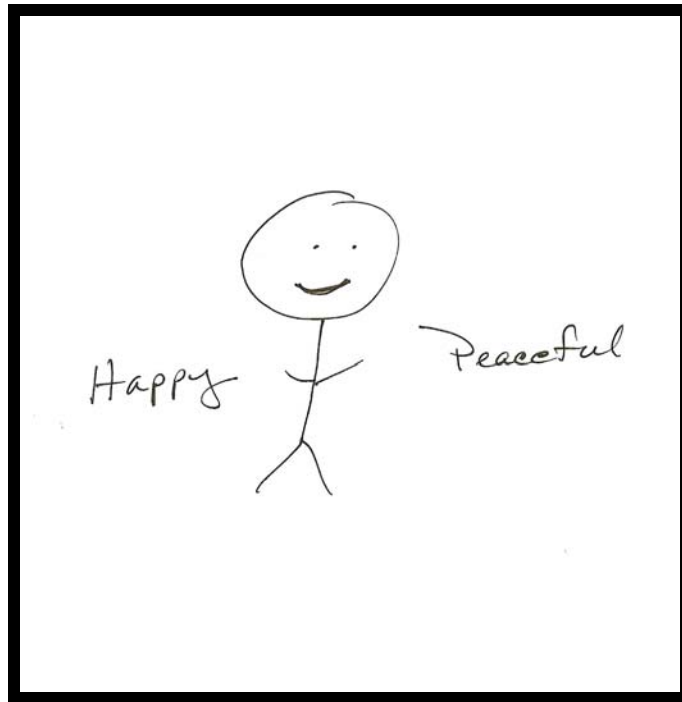
dreams and rearing their children in a happy home. His vision may have been to have his wife be his “other mother” and let him still be the cherished child (see Figure 11).



*Figure 12.* Shirley’s view of their marriage for many years.

Shirley felt that her husband turned away from her after the birth of their first child. His one attempt at bathing his new daughter was a disaster and that caused him to withdraw from Shirley and his daughter. Shirley described the drawing in these words: “For many years...apart...looking in different directions.” In the drawing, the expressions on the faces show mild interest in what is outside the couple. This may indicate that they focused on other things rather than their marriage. Shirley tried to reach out, but her husband did not respond to her advances (see Figure 12).





*Figure 13.* Shirley's life in the present.

Shirley described this drawing as a picture of herself, smiling, happy and peaceful. The decision to divorce her husband had been difficult, but she is now happy to be alone. During the marriage, Shirley felt like she was doing something wrong...that she was a failure. Finally, she realized that she could not “fix” the relationship with her husband and perhaps he was not capable of giving her the type of relationship she needed. Shirley stated, “I think because the pressure is gone, my outlook on life is much better” (see Figure 13).

### **Fina's Story**

*Married 25 years; Divorced 6 years; Second marriage 5 years; Divorced 5 years*

Fina is an attractive Hispanic woman who has been my beautician for the past 14 years. I first started using her services when I moved to College Station in 1995. She is very creative in her professional life and her personal life. We always enjoy talking about decorating when I go to her to have my hair done. She watches HGTV during the day while she works on her customers.

Fina always asks me what I am working on "this time" (because I always have a project of some sort going on) and has often inquired about my college studies. When I told her the topic for my dissertation she said, "You ought to interview me, I could really tell you some stuff!" So, I said, "I would love to interview you."

We met in a local restaurant on Fina's day off. She is average height and weight, with dark brown hair and brown eyes. She dresses very stylishly and her hair and make up enhance her natural good looks. She turns heads even though she is in her late fifties.

Fina describes herself as "always, always an optimist." In fact, she said, "The word 'no' or 'I can't' doesn't exist in my vocabulary." This trait may have caused her some trouble in the past as she explained in the following:

I just know I can do anything and everything. I think that's what got me in trouble...with men...I take over and then after awhile I'm the leader and then I start resenting it. That's not good. I've regretted it.

While so many baby boom women had parents who had happy, secure marriages, Fina's was different. Fina explained it this way:

They had a terrible marriage. My mother endured because she didn't have an education and she had eleven kids. So, where was she going? From when I was little, I thought that was what you were supposed to do. My mother endured and my daddy was a horrible father. He had several lovers...you know, Latinos, Latin lovers. You have your family at home and then your mistress on the side. And my mother accepted it and she loved him through her whole life. So, when I married, I thought that was what I was supposed to do, too. And I did for a long time until I opened my eyes.

Fina did not have role models for marriage at home, so she took her role models from a popular television show, *Leave It to Beaver*. She wanted to have a home and family like that. She explained:

I wanted to have the house, the children, the husband...happy...have a little nest at the bank. One of these days we were going to move to a big house. That was my dream because I never had it when I was little.

Fina met her husband while she was still in high school. He attended Allen Academy in Bryan, which was a private, college prep high school. He was really something special, as she related in the following:

I was really in love and I was 17 years old. So, what do you know? He was a singer in a band and attended Allen Academy. In those days they wore a uniform and 'Oh my God!' He was voted 'Most Likely to Succeed' and he was interested in 'little old me.'

She married her "dream husband" and they had two boys. At first they were

reasonably happy, but Fina soon realized that her husband, Mr. Most Likely to Succeed, was not very responsible. She stated,

I think the problem was that he was never asked to do anything [when he was growing up]. He had no responsibilities, ever. He was one of 5 brothers but they never had to take the trash out, get up early, or get a job. He didn't have to do anything. That's not good.

Fina began realizing that she was the stronger person. She decided that if she was going to have the things she wanted in life, she would have to be the one to work for them. She explained her decision in the following:

I thought, well, I have a good job and I'll just do it myself. I'll open the accounts; I'll save for my children; I'll buy a home; I'll buy the things I need; I'll go on vacation; I'll do it. And after awhile you begin to resent them.

Saving money for her children was a top priority for Fina. She married before she finished high school and she dreamed of her children having the chance to go to college. She explained:

My idea was: they are not going to live like me. I did not have a high school education; these kids are going to college. So, little by little, this 17-18 year old girl saved. They used to give you these little black account books, the little bitty ones, and I would go every pay check, twice a month and say, 'Here's \$100.' So I saved \$10,000 for my kids to go to college. In those days, that was a lot of money.

Her husband was in business and worked for a monument company. According

to Fina, “He would let anybody and everybody buy monuments and then he wouldn’t collect the money. He was just lazy. He would just sit there day in and day out.”

Fina finally realized how lazy and irresponsible her husband had become. She remembered:

One Monday, when I was off, I said, ‘I’m going to go put some money in the boys’ bank account.’ So I went to the bank and gave them my little book and I said, ‘Here is my deposit and I want you to total it.’ The lady at the bank said, ‘You have \$500.’ My world just came crashing down. I said, ‘Call the police, somebody stole my money. There’s something very wrong. I’m supposed to have \$9000.’ She said, ‘No, it’s all gone. Your husband took it out, here’s the signatures.’ And that was his signature; I knew it like I knew my own.

Fina’s husband had taken the money to repay suppliers in his business who wanted their money. He was too lazy and irresponsible to collect from the people who had bought the monuments, so he could not pay his suppliers.

This incident happened at about the 10<sup>th</sup> year of their marriage. This was a “big blow” to Fina. She could not understand how he could do that to her. She felt betrayed and cheated by her husband whom she had trusted. During the first 10 years, she had trusted her husband with her finances. She even allowed him to come to the beauty shop and get her check and take it to the bank for her. She later found out that he would go to restaurants and just “sit back and relax with his friends” while she worked. After the incident at the bank she told him, “As of today, you will never see another red penny

from me.” She remembered, “I *woke up* that day, when I found out that he was being lazy and that he wasn’t trying. And he started hating me from that day.”

Fina was reared in the Mexican culture and in those days “you did not divorce.” She stated, “Your parents told you when you got married, you are not coming back home. If you leave him, you find somewhere else, because you are not coming back home. You just stayed.” So, even though there was a major split in the marriage, she stayed.

Another area where Fina’s husband was lacking in her eyes was his relationship with their boys. She stated,

I don’t think he was taught the values of being a good parent. And his mother loved him dearly, but I think she spoiled him too much. He never played with the kids, never took them fishing or hunting.

In Fina’s family, her father was the disciplinarian and often was abusive, she explained:

I come from a hard family. My father would spank us and we were scared of him. When we saw him coming we would hide. So, I was raised thinking that I was supposed to be the strict parent. I loved them [her sons] and I would tell them, ‘I’m gonna spank you because I warned you and you didn’t do it.’ So I would carry through with it. I never bluffed them and didn’t finish what I was going to do. So, they knew they had to be good. I said, ‘I will give you \$50 if you make straight A’s.’ And they would do it. After awhile they learned how to study and they would do it automatically without me saying anything.

Her husband never spanked them but he was not their buddy, either. She said, “He was just there, like that chair there. They loved their father, but...”

Fina managed to stay in the marriage even though she was disillusioned by her husband’s lack of motivation and withdrawal from her. She remembered:

At ten years, I just opened my eyes. I was unhappy, but I did OK. I had my job and I was beginning to really do good and make money. Everything was good.

My mother-in-law took care of my kids so I was able to work a lot.

Fina was always the worker in the family. Her husband mostly watched TV and read the paper. She became more disgusted with him as the years went by, but she stayed because she kept hoping things would change and wanted her children to have their father. She remembered thinking, “If they don’t have a father, they are going to become part of the 60% drop out rate that Mexicans have. I didn’t want them to be that.”

The final break came when she found out about some financial matters that he had been hiding from her. One incident had to do with the Internal Revenue Service. While Fina was at work, her husband would get the mail and hide letters to her from the IRS. She explained:

The IRS was trying to get in touch with me because we owed them some back taxes, and I didn’t know about it. So, one Monday, when I was home, I intercepted one of their letters and I called them. I said, ‘What do you mean, we owe \$4000?’ And the lady said, ‘Oh no ma’am, that’s a penalty, you owe \$16,000.’

The second issue had to do with their home mortgage. Previously, they had almost lost their house two times because her husband had not paid the mortgage premiums. The first two times, Fina did not know about it, but the third time she found out. This was the last straw. She remembered:

It was right after we lost the house for the third time. When I found out, I went to his dad and I said, 'Listen, you either pay this debt, or I am divorcing your son.' And he said, 'Oh, no, don't do that. Don't do that to *fat boy* [this is what we called him]!' He said, 'We'll take care of it, he'll have a heart attack.'

So between the house being lost and the IRS, Fina finally had enough. She remembered thinking:

What am I doing? Why do I feel like I have to be married? This is not healthy. So when he came home, I lost it for a little bit and I loaded the shotgun and I said, 'You come in this house and I'll blow you away! I will!' I was so mad. He just got pale and his legs kind of buckled and he almost fell. And I said, 'Tomorrow if I pass by here and your car is here, I'm going to call the police.' So, that was the only way I got him out of the house. My sister was there, too.

Fina was finally able to take control of her life after 25 years of marriage. Living with a husband who did nothing to contribute to the family had been a drain on her both financially and emotionally. Her Mexican heritage and the life she witnessed at home contributed to the reluctance to divorce her husband, but when she made the break, she never looked back. She explained:



I've been to hell and back, but it made me strong, or at least (helped me) not to lose my mind or have a nervous breakdown. It is what I saw when I was growing up and I was already tough from that. I saw my mom, and I didn't want to be like that. It took me 25 years...but I kept hoping...and I wanted my children to have their father.

By the time Fina decided to get a divorce, she was beyond grief. In fact, she did not even care if he showed up at the courthouse, which he did not. She remembered:

I was so tired. When I was at the courthouse and he didn't show up, I wasn't thinking, 'Where is he; what is he doing.' I was thinking, 'Boy, they really need to clean that damn floor!' I didn't care if he showed up. My heart wasn't beating faster. I was thinking, 'They need to clean this damn place up!'

Fina's divorce made her feel like there was a heavy weight lifted off of her. She was concerned about how her children would react, as she related,

Once my kids were OK with it [the divorce], I felt like I was just let out of that damn cage. I was in charge of my life. Because I went from my parents' house to a husband, I never went to Prom, I never had any of that. I got married because I was pregnant. In those days you *had to get married*.

Fina's divorce did not change her daily routine. She had always worked and had been the main breadwinner; this did not change. She relied upon her Catholic faith and felt that this helped keep her family together. She was very close to her sisters who remained supportive through everything that happened in the marriage and during the divorce. She also had girlfriends at work, other hairdressers, that she enjoyed going out

with to dances and clubs. She dated quite a few men, but none of them showed her the respect she demanded. Her greatest loss from the divorce was the family unit. She explained:

I feel the loss of being together as a family. You know, the holidays when we're together with my grandbabies. It causes a lot of tension. My kids want to be with me most of all, but also their dad.

Another difficulty facing Fina was her ex-husband's attachment to her family. She would go to functions given by her family, and he would be there. She remembered:

It was hard because he would hang around my family; he didn't have anyone else. I'd say, 'This is my family and we're divorced.' So, I would show up at a function and there he'd be in the middle of all my brothers and sisters. He would look at me like I wasn't supposed to be there. I told him, 'Listen here, you said hello to everybody at this table, if you are going to sit here, you address me. You say, Hello Fina, how are you?' I said, 'This is my family,' and I said it in front of everybody.

About 8 years after the divorce, Fina met and married her second husband. She did not intend to get married again because she "was burned" in her previous marriage and was enjoying her freedom. She felt free to do as she pleased. But she also felt that maybe she should get married again. She explained:

I told myself, maybe this is the one God wants me to be with, and I'm getting older. And he seems to love me a lot and I would love to be loved that way, if I

could. And he was [loving], for about the first two years. He was good and he was kind. He gave me a clue when he said, 'I don't want to make the same mistakes I made with my first wife.' And I thought. 'What could that be?' I guess if I would have talked to her, she would have told me.

Fina and her new husband had only dated for about a year and a few months when they married. In hindsight she realized that it was "too fast." She stated, "He really tried, but deep down inside the person will always come out...the real you. So you might as well put it out at the beginning."

For the first two years, things rocked along fairly well, and then he became ill. Along with his illness he became depressed and was unable to work. For Fina, this was "history repeating itself." She remembered thinking:

Here we go again. I had to carry everything. And I would have understood if he said, 'I'm sick sweetheart, come sit with me; or look, I opened this can of soup, come and eat with me. Or I went swimming today; I'm trying to take care of myself. I took my sugar levels; I did something for myself.' But he just sat there. Do you know what he would tell me? 'Well, I almost passed out today because I had nothing to eat.' I thought, 'Oh, man, I'm making the living, the least you could do is take care of yourself.'

This went on for the next three years. Fina tried to be understanding and supportive, but her husband became more sullen and resentful. Finally he stopped speaking to her. She recalled,

I knew he was really sick, but even sick, he got to where he wouldn't speak to me. I would come in the house, tired, beat after working all day and he would look straight at the TV. And I thought, 'This is not healthy.' I said to myself. 'Here I go again; the first one did the same thing to me. We lived in the same house with no communication, and now this one's doing it to me.'

The final break came over her relationship with her sisters. She remembered:

He didn't want the family to come over or my sisters. I told him, 'If you don't love my sisters and you don't want my sisters around...I'm sorry. But If I have to pick between my sisters and you, I can find another man, but I can't find sisters!' I said, 'I'm sorry, if you want to go home, go for it.' I let go. I made myself hard and part of me still wants to be with him. I still love him.

Fina stated repeatedly that she had become "hard" from her experiences with her parents' marriage growing up and from her own marriages. Even though her marriages were not what she wanted them to be, she learned valuable lessons about herself. She stated, "I can't stand to be around wishy, washy people and people that are not motivated fast enough to move with me...it suffocates me. So I think my marriages motivated me to be even better or stronger."

She also learned that she has no interest in getting married again. She explained: I just know that I don't want to be married. I don't ever want to do that again. It affects myself and it affects my children and everybody around. It just doesn't seem to fit the way I thought it was going to fit.

In the first divorce, Fina did not lose anything financially because she had

provided everything. She even paid for the divorce. In the second divorce, Fina lost a lot financially, as she explained:

It took me quite a bit of money to get rid of him. He wanted his part and I didn't want to lose my ranch. My children helped me out. And he left with quite a bit of money.

Fina is recovering from the effects of the last divorce but has confidence that she will come out on top. She enjoys spending money on things she likes and feels good about the land she purchased, which has quadrupled in value since she bought it. She stated, "I make a very good living, but I work my tail off." Her work had been her ticket to a life that she takes pride in and enjoys.

Another area that Fina takes pride in is her children. Both of her children have fulfilled the dreams that the little 17-year old girl had for them. She explained:

I have two grown sons, both of them are attorneys, by the grace of God. I had nothing to do with that. All the hell that I've gone through and the dark times have panned out at the end. And they love me. They love me and they look to me. Whenever they are going with their families on vacation, guess who they call first. 'Mother, how would you like to go?' 'I'll be there.' But if I was the kind of mother they didn't want, they would say, 'We're gonna be gone for awhile, mom.' They don't do that.

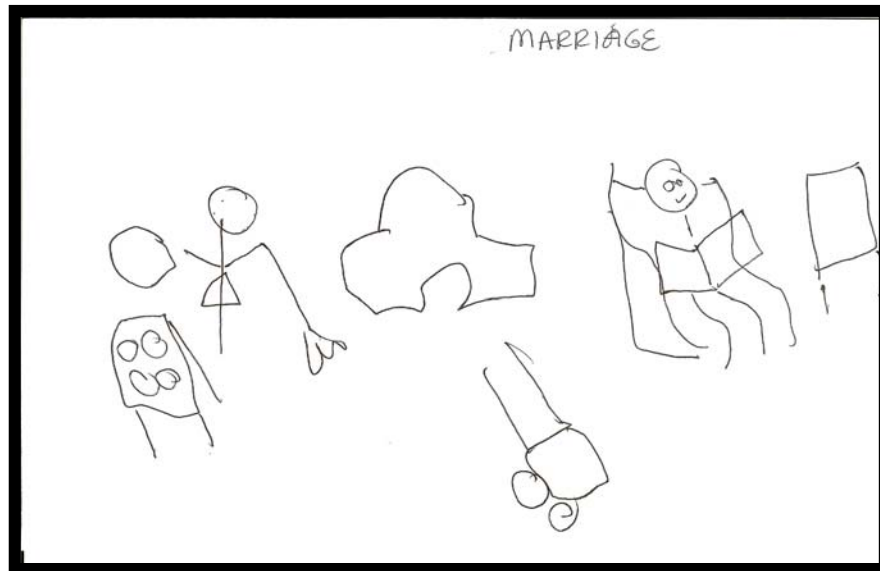
Fina's life now is "really busy and good." She owns her own home and enjoys family activities with her sisters and her children and grandchildren. Her work is very creative and she continues to engage in creative activities in her spare time. Recently

she had a wedding at her ranch. She explained, “It was a lot of fun, I worked day and night. I would leave my job and go straight up there and hang up tulle and flowers. Everything you can think of for a wedding was done outside and inside. Everything I do is in the creative area.”

Fina’s advice for other women in her situation is to “make yourself happy.” She says to ask yourself, “Why do you want to go to your old age in misery?” She also learned that there is no way to know how people are going to change. She thought she was sure about her husbands, but they turned out to be different than they presented themselves at first.

A positive outlook on life is the hallmark of Fina’s life. Even though she has struggled and faced hardship and heartache, she has come out with an enthusiasm for the future. She wants to travel, do artwork and photography, work with plants, and learn make-up tricks for women to make them look younger. She related, “I’ve got so many things I want to do. I’m just into everything. I don’t want life to be over.”

*Visual Interpretation*



*Figure 14.* Fina's view of her marriage.

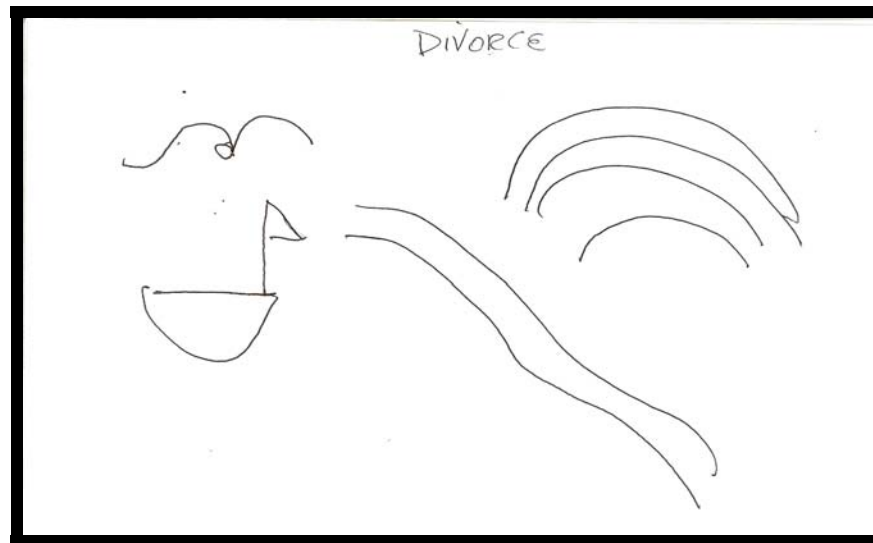
Fina's drawing depicts her husband in his recliner on the right side of the picture and herself in the kitchen on the left side. She described her marriage as follows:

He's in the chair reading the newspaper, watching TV. That's all he ever did.

I'm in the kitchen, doing everything, washing dishes, running the vacuum, mopping, just doing everything, washing the car, lawnmower. That's my life.

Do you know what my neighbors said? The guys in the neighborhood would say, 'I want a wife like her.' I would mow the yard with the flashlight on. When I got out of work and the yard looked horrible, I would mow the lawn and I would attach the flashlight to the handle. Yes, ma'am.

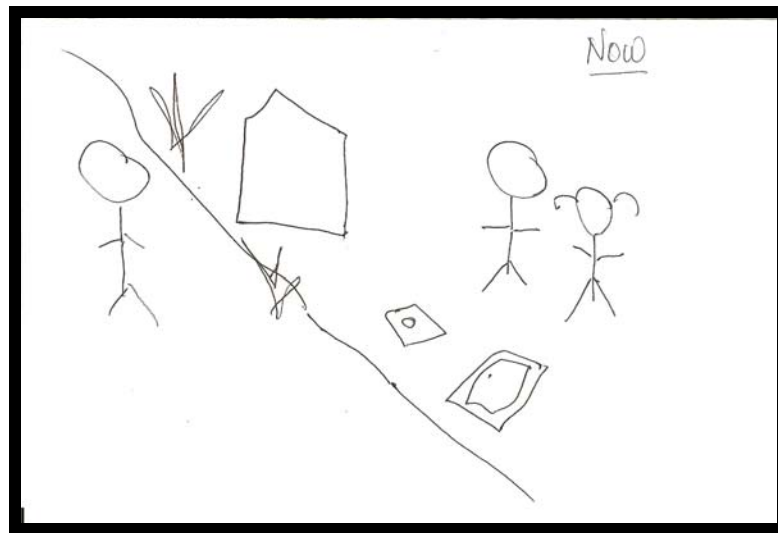
Fina was the worker in the marriage and her husband did not have her same work ethic. Fina finally got tired of being the one who “did everything” and she initiated the divorce (see Figure14).



*Figure 15.* Fina’s view of her divorce.

Rather than being a traumatic occasion, Fina saw her divorce as an opportunity to be free. She described the divorce as, “The rainbow, travel, and freedom.” She was finally free to pursue her own dreams without someone dragging her down (see Figure 15).





*Figure 16.* Fina's life in the present.

Fina's drawing is divided into two sections. On the left is her work life and the right side depicts her family, grandchildren, and various interests. She described the drawing like this: "Lots of work, and my children, the ranch, and my brother...we live together. I want to travel, do photography, paintings, plants. I don't want my life to be over. I'm just into everything." Fina continues to be a "worker" in everything that she does. But, now, she is doing what she wants to do and she does not have to support anyone but herself (see Figure 16).

## **Jackie's Story**

### *Married 20 Years; Divorced 11 Years*

Jackie's story would make a good movie, because of the dramatic events that caused her to come to College Station. We met at our church singles group and my first impression was that she was very cautious and secretive about her circumstances. Jackie and several other members of our group went out to dinner one night and someone had a camera and wanted to take pictures of the group. Jackie ducked out of the picture and told us that she did not take pictures. Later we learned that she had completely changed her identity in order to escape her ex-husband who had threatened to kill her.

To look at Jackie, one would never think that she would be involved with any seriously dangerous situation. Jackie is an attractive woman in her late fifties. She is small in stature, with light brown hair which she wears short and casual. She is quiet, until you get to know her, and then you find a quick sense of humor. In her "other life" she was a well-known interior designer whose work appeared in Architectural Digest. She was able to resume her work as a designer, but had to change all of her credentials when she changed her identity.

Jackie grew up in East Texas with her parents and a brother and sister. Her parents had a happy marriage and her mother "played the role of the '50's housewife." She explained, "Whatever the breadwinner went out and did was just fine. She loved him and was lost when he died. My dad told my brother that he would have to take care of her because she couldn't do things." Jackie assumed that her marriage would be "just

like my mother and dad's." She thought, "Whoever I picked to marry would grow up to be just like my dad: sweet, kind and would love me."

As a child, Jackie was outgoing and sure of herself. She was reared in a stable, Christian home where things were very "black and white." She remembered, "I would be told things like: 'pretty is as pretty does' with the direct implication 'you are not pretty' because you did something."

When thinking about marriage, Jackie was idealistic. She explained:

I grew up reading too much Cinderella. I didn't think you could be complete until you got married. I had met him [her husband] and he was charming and handsome, and my clock was ticking. I had my 10-year high school reunion coming up and I didn't want to be the only one that wasn't married. So, I thought, 'Everybody else is married and starting to have kids, so I guess it's time I need to get married or I'll be an old maid.'

Jackie's husband met all of her criteria that she had set for a marriage partner. He was good-looking, charming and had a master's degree. She recalled that there were other men she had dated who "were probably going to be successful," but she turned her back on them because they did not have a college degree. She wanted someone who would be in a white-collar rather than blue-collar profession. Also, he was very outgoing and charming, especially when he wanted something. She recalled, "He could be mad as a hornet at me, and somebody would come by that he wanted to impress and he could just switch it off like that."

Before they were married, Jackie's husband was out-going and gregarious, and being with him was a lot of fun. But even while they were dating, he became progressively more possessive and suspicious. After the wedding, it did not take very long for Jackie to realize that she and her new husband had different values. On their honeymoon Jackie's husband gave her an idea of what his behavior would be like in the future. She explained:

On our honeymoon, we flew overnight to Las Vegas. When we got to the casino, I wasn't familiar with how to gamble. The room wasn't ready, so he looked at his watch and said, 'I'll meet you back here in an hour.' I was just so dumb. We had different values. I think he liked what he saw about me and my family, he wanted that part. But somehow, he really didn't. He mentioned one time about his dad telling him, 'If you want a good little girl, find a church girl.' I think he figured they'd be a captive audience because there was no way they'd get a divorce.

Being the "good little, church girl" that she was, Jackie made the best of the situation and did her best to build a successful marriage. Problems in the marriage surfaced over financial matters. Jackie's husband had a volatile personality and this caused him to have difficulty keeping a job. She explained:

He had so much more potential than he ever lived up to. The wildness in him would sabotage things. He had a master's degree, he could make good money, but he peaked out at about 32, and he went down from there. He was on a rise but he either got forced out or fired. It was usually because of personality

conflicts. He would say, 'So and so is just out to get me.' He really never kept a job more than 3 years. He'd be unemployed and collect unemployment and I'd be squirreling money away. I'd be criticized for that, but it was a survival thing. If he saw it, he would either drink or gamble it away.

Jackie's husband had a problem with alcohol. When he drank he became abusive and suspicious of her. One incident happened at a Christmas party. Jackie remembered:

We had gone to a Christmas party and there were people there that I knew and they came up to me and hugged me and I'd be friendly. He'd been drinking and the alcohol would prompt him to get angrier later. By the time we got home, it had built into these accusations of: 'What about this one or that one, have you ever slept with him? Did you ever date him? Did you sleep with him?' It was always that. If I went on a business trip out of town, which I had to do sometimes, it was with other professional people. There was nothing romantic going on. But by the time I got home, he would have been drinking and sulking and he would throw accusations at me. This happened early in the marriage, but I just kept hanging on because I was such an optimist. I would think, 'If he could just quit drinking,' which he would promise to do.

Perhaps Jackie's husband was suspicious of her because he was known to have several affairs with other women. Jackie explained:

I know of 3 affairs and they were all with married women. I don't think any of these women would have left their husbands for him; they were very well-off.

One was a mutual friend, couple friends; she had been to our house to play dominos. I found out because he had her stay at our place while I was gone with the kids. I later found an earring in my bed. And a photograph of her fell out of his briefcase [she was wrapped up in a sheet in a hotel room]. Later, when I was going through my divorce a light bulb went off in my head and I thought, 'I even have a scriptural reason [adultery] for the divorce.'

While Jackie's husband did not always have a job, she continued to work even while she was having children. She recalled,

He liked me bringing in money. I pretty much worked for myself after we first married because I would face constant accusations about my co-workers. So, I started working for myself and he sort of kept track of the books, the income and out-go. That way, I was available to take care of everything. I could set my own hours and when we started having kids, it was just easier. He liked the income and he acted like he was proud of me.

Another area of discord occurred over the children's religious education. Jackie was reared in a Christian home and wanted her children to be taught about Christianity. Her husband, on the other hand wanted them to know about other religions. He said, "If they were born somewhere else, they could be Buddhist or something." Jackie felt that it would be confusing to the children and wanted them to go to church as a family. She remembered,

Sometimes he would go to church with us, but usually it was just for social reasons or to brag about something, like it was hunting season and he had gotten

a big deer. He would lay there on the couch on Sunday mornings watching cartoons. I would have to explain to the kids why they would have to come with me, even though Daddy stayed home watching TV and mowing the yard. He would go occasionally, but we would take two cars, so he could go at the time he wanted to go.

Jackie's marriage was not turning out to be the one she had imagined. She began her marriage with high hopes for the future, she thought that getting married would make everything turn out right. But things were not working out that way and he even threatened her with dire consequences if she left him. She recalled:

He had told me early in our marriage, within the first few weeks, when he was drunk one time, he said something like, 'Do you want a divorce?' And I don't know what I told him, but he said, 'Don't you ever try to leave me, you'll be looking over your shoulder for the rest of your life.'

Jackie believed him and went to see a counselor early in the marriage. Even though the counselor told her that some marriages were not meant to be and that she should "cut her losses" and get out while she was young, Jackie did not do it. She rationalized that this was not a Christian counselor and all she needed to do was go back and work harder. So that is what she did.

After about 10 years, things got bad again. Her husband had lost his job again and they relocated to a house in the country near a small town. She recalled,

He was being mean to me again and I felt very lonely. I had two little babies, no neighbors, and I was just really feeling sad. I went to see our preacher and he

told me to read a book on how to be a better Christian woman or something. His message was that if I was a righteous Christian woman, my husband would come to the Lord. I left there feeling really bad. I got the book and tried harder.

Without having a “good reason” to get a divorce, Jackie again set her mind to the task of “fixing” her marriage. She continued with her work and church activities. The children’s activities became something that she and her husband could share. She was the “soccer mom” for her sons’ friends, and her husband was the coach. She even had another child, a daughter, during this time.

As time went by, things began to deteriorate again between Jackie and her husband. He did not speak to her for months at a time and would embarrass her in front of people to punish her. She remembered:

From June to November, my husband was hardly speaking to me. He would come through the garage, walk past me in the kitchen and not speak and then make remarks to other people about me. An example of this was when he said he had to take some time off to get his garden in. I said, ‘Well you don’t *have to* get your garden in.’ And he said, ‘Oh, so you don’t want me to have a garden.’ He held that against me for months, from the spring into the fall.

At one point, a friend of theirs died of a brain tumor and Jackie remembered thinking, “He was such a nice guy. How does this happen to nice people?” She did not want a divorce, ever, but kept thinking, “How do I get out of this? I can’t get away.” Not wanting to admit it, even to herself, she secretly wished that it had been her husband who had died.



During this time, her church had a marriage seminar for couples. She remembered going to it by herself. The speaker was very good and she thought, “If anyone could tell me something to help me, he could.” So, Jackie spoke with him on the phone first. Later he shared with her that God did not want divorce, but He also did not want husbands to treat their wives like a doormat. She recalled, “He was giving me an out.” He said, “You need to get out. You are not unjustified. You’ve tried everything.”

Jackie began seriously thinking about divorce. She wanted to do it “logically” so she talked to a friend who worked for a law firm. This friend told her which lawyers to talk to and Jackie made an appointment with one who was available. The attorney told her how the divorce worked and told her she would need to have a deposit of \$2500 that was not refundable, so for her to be sure before she proceeded with the divorce. He told her to go home and think about it and when she came back to bring certain records with her. So, Jackie started collecting receipts and putting them in the trunk of her car. She was taking her time, because Christmas was coming up.

Jackie had not told her husband about her plans for divorce. She did not know what his reaction would be and she needed time to make plans for the safety of herself and her children. Jackie remembered what happened next in the following:

One night I came in with my daughter and he was drunk and sitting in the living room in the dark *with a gun*. My daughter ran on into her room and he said, ‘Bout time you got here.’ And I said, ‘What are you going to do? Are you going to shoot me?’ He said, ‘No, first I’m going to destroy you to your kids.’ I wasn’t sure if he was going to shoot himself or me or what. Finally he got up and laid

the gun on top of the refrigerator and went into the bedroom to sleep. I went into my daughter's room with her and we locked the door and went to sleep. The boys had gone camping at the farm and I was worried sick. I kept thinking, 'Has he done something to them?' I kept trying to call them and could not get an answer on their cell phone. That was the longest night. It might have been the next day that I went to the lawyer. I can't remember. But he saw something in my daytimer and said, 'I know what you're #@%^ planning to do.'

The next day, Jackie had to act on her plans to leave her husband. Her oldest son was getting his senior ring that day and they were planning to have lunch with her daughter at her school. She called her middle son at his school to see if he was all right and found out that her husband had picked him up. She was afraid that he would go to her daughter's school and get her, too. She spoke to the principal to ask him not to let her husband pick her daughter up, but the principal said that since he was the father, the principal could not stop him without a restraining order. Jackie remembered,

So I immediately went to the bank and took out some money and went to the lawyer's office to get a restraining order. My husband kept calling me and I told him I was out shopping. I told him I was at Wal Mart. He said, 'Well, I'm at Wal Mart and I don't see you anywhere.' We were stalling trying to get the papers signed at the courthouse. He finally did track us down, and I tried to hand him the papers but he didn't want to take them.

Jackie called her middle son and asked him to meet her so she could pick him up.

Her husband had been with him all afternoon and had told him that he and his mom were having some problems, but they were going to work everything out. So, Jackie's middle son did not want to go with her. Jackie's attorney told her not to go home, so she spent the night with a friend. She had her oldest son and her daughter, but her middle son would not come with her.

Jackie always thought that her children would want to be with her. When someone asked her who she thought the children would want to live with, she said, "Oh, me." During the divorce, her middle son moved in with her, but later "his dad took him away". Her middle son chose to live with his dad. He had always been "his daddy's boy". Jackie did not expect to lose her middle son. She stated,

I don't think I would have gone through with it [the divorce] if I had known I would lose my child. But I might be dead! He kept my son because his lawyer said he would pay less child support if he kept one child. Also, I think if my son had not gone with his dad, his dad might have gone off the deep end, even worse...a mass murderer or something.

Jackie had made the move to get a divorce, but her husband did not take this move rationally. Her husband wanted them to see a counselor and so Jackie agreed. After he saw the counselor a few times he demanded that she (the counselor) "get everything fixed". He got angry and accused Jackie of manipulating the counselor because it was not "getting fixed" quick enough. Jackie remembered,

The counselor called me one Saturday morning and told me that he was a lot more difficult that she could handle. She suggested that I have him committed,

but not in Texas, but Arizona, because he would probably outsmart the best places she knew about in Texas. And she also said that because of the things he had said to her [the counselor], I could really be in danger. He was talking about suicide, which he had said almost from the time we got married. She said that he could be suicidal, but more than likely he would take someone out with him, which would be me because I was the target of his anger.

During the divorce process, Jackie tried to keep her family life as normal as possible for the sake of the children. She likened it to a “death in the family.” The children went to school, got their lessons and continued in their activities. The children were 9, 14, and 17 during this time. Jackie found support at her church. There was a divorce recovery group at church and she met three other women from her neighborhood who were also going through a divorce. She stated, “I had no idea, I thought I’d be the only one in town.”

Jackie also relied on friendships at church and in town. The preacher and youth minister at her church were very supportive of her and especially helpful to her oldest son. She remembered, “They were so supportive and they understood. I think a lot of people had sensed...there was such coarseness about him [her husband]...but they put up with him, thinking, well, she’s sweet.”

Her parents were also a source of support during this time. They were not surprised by the divorce. Jackie stated, “I think they had just put up with him for years. But, they didn’t know, I was a real good hider. They had no idea it was so bad.”

Jackie's work as an interior designer continued to be her source of income throughout the divorce. She relied on her work as a creative outlet and her means to support her children and herself. She stated, "Oh, I love my work. Through all the rough spots, it was the thing that I could count on as more stable than anything else...my work and church."

Through the darkest periods of Jackie's ordeal, she relied on her Christian faith and prayer to sustain her. Her daddy would tell her every night on the phone, "Just keep your faith, God will always take care of you, just keep your faith." Jackie also used journaling to help her cope. She stated, "Prayer and journaling...I wrote volumes and volumes...like a diary."

Jackie went ahead with her plans for the divorce. The divorce process took 11 months. During this time, her husband continued to follow her and even came to the house. One time he left flowers and love notes, the next time he tried to destroy things by having a bonfire in the fireplace. One time he caught her as she was going into the garage and lifted her up and shook her because he had heard that she was tape recording his calls. She had to call 911. She never knew what would happen next, as she explained in the following:

I lived in fear, fear for my life. I didn't want to do it [get a divorce], but I didn't have any choice. When the judge ruled that we were divorced, I felt like the weight of the world was lifted off my shoulders. After the divorce, he wouldn't let me go. For 10 months after the divorce, he kept following me and filing motions; he kept threatening me and dragging me to court. I had no way to

get away. No way to stop him until I disappeared. The judge said that was the best thing. They couldn't protect me any other way because the man wouldn't stop. A psychologist that my daughter would see, every time she had a visit, said that he was not going to leave us alone. That was the only solution he could see. The judge said he had never seen anyone so [angry]...the veins on the side of his head looked like they would explode.

Jackie decided to disappear, change her name, and start all over. She had been told that she would probably have to move twice in order to be sure she was safe, but she moved to College Station and that is where she stayed for the next several years. She remembered:

Moving away helped me stay alive. It brought all sorts of new challenges. It was very lonesome at first. It was scary. We had gone all over looking for a place to live, but this was the first place we actually moved. I had no job, a shoebox full of money, no identification, nothing...like I fell down out of the sky.

Jackie remembered how almost magically doors opened for her without difficulty in her new town. She was able to get an apartment without proper identification. She was able to get a job as an interior designer without her credentials. She joined a singles group at church and made new friends without explaining where she was from or her real identity. All of these things she explains as the providence of God. She remembered, "So many doors opened...one person after another, it was like they

were little angels. All those things, they weren't on going forever, but right when I needed it, they were there. It gives me chill bumps."

During Jackie's marriage their financial situation was "feast and famine." When her husband was working, they had plenty, but when he lost his job, it was her income that sustained them. Now, as a single parent, Jackie was able to accumulate money and not have to worry about her husband drinking it up or gambling it away. She stated, "If you were married to someone that you would still be married to, you would be building something. But when you are married to someone who is cheating on you and gambling, things are tight."

Jackie also had to "pay him off" to get rid of him. She remembered,

I paid him off. He gave up his right to see my daughter and then he changed his mind and took me back to court. He wanted to say that something about the house was unfair even though he had agreed to it. I had to pay him off to get rid of him. It seemed unjust that I had to pay the man off. [Jackie had come in to the marriage with money in the bank and he had student loans and no assets. She had used her money for down payments on their homes and had made most of the payments].

But Jackie agreed to give him more money to have him back off. This tactic did not help in the long run.

Jackie's expectations for marriage were formed in her parents' home with their traditional Christian values. Her own marriage was one of high expectations, but little rewards. The divorce did not bring a "ripping apart" as would happen in some

marriages. Instead, Jackie felt that she was “more alone when she was married than when she was single.” She recalled, “At night he’d be passed out and I’d think...tears would just roll down my face. I’d think how lonesome I felt. In Proverbs it talks about an unloved woman who is married...that was me.”

The *Loss of the Dream* for Jackie started early. She explained,

I think that started on the honeymoon almost. I guess I thought that marriage would magically ...and things weren’t working out that way. He was threatening me if I ever left...and I was raised to think that once you were married you were married for ever and ever. If you leave them, then you can’t ever remarry. So, I didn’t want to be alone, be an old maid or worse be a divorcee. So I just thought, I’ll try harder and it will work out.

Even several years after the divorce, Jackie still felt the loss of the dream in her fear of opening herself up to new relationships. She explained:

I think I was so hurt by the loss of the dream, the happily ever after, that I was scared to open myself up for any other possibilities of love. And I think that I might do that [now]. I think I might be healed. I’ve seen that there might be some good men around. I really thought that there weren’t any.

When asked about other losses from the divorce, at first, Jackie could not think of anything that she lost. Later, she explained:

I guess the advantages of the divorce outweighed the disadvantages. But, I did lose my middle son. And I do cry sometimes about that. He is so much like his father, he may be just fine. I also lost my home, my identity...really, because I



had to change my name and everything to get away from him. I also lost my image of the suburban wife: home with a pool and a lifestyle. Not being part of a couple is also hard. Society is 2 by 2 and you feel kind of beaten down. Going to church by yourself, when it's all couples, is hard.

Jackie explained how the divorce changed her outlook on life by giving her a "fresh start." She did not have to stay in an unhappy marriage; she could start over. Another insight that Jackie learned from the divorce is that happiness is up to the individual; marriage does not make you complete. She explained her new viewpoint in the following:

I guess after you've been divorced, your radar goes off. You look around and see all the unhappy people that are still together. You know, life is short. Things change, they are only there for a minute. You have to grab them while they are there. You can't count on your spouse to be there later, you can't count on your kids to be there later, your parents, or your job.

Jackie also found strength through the ordeal that she did not know she possessed. She explained,

I found that I am stronger than I would have thought. When I moved here I thought that I would be lucky if I survived a year. I still, every once in awhile, have a nightmare where he showed up and held a gun to my head. He blames every failure in life on me because I wouldn't take him back.

Jackie's advice to other women facing a similar situation is to "cut your losses as soon as possible." She continued,

It's not going to get easier later. They're not going to change. And it's not good for the kids. You stay for the sake of the kids, but you are only going to take a chance on losing the kids that you are staying for.

Jackie's story has a happy ending. She stayed in College Station where her oldest son attended college and her daughter finished high school. She was able to move to Houston after her daughter graduated. She has started another "new life" in the big city.

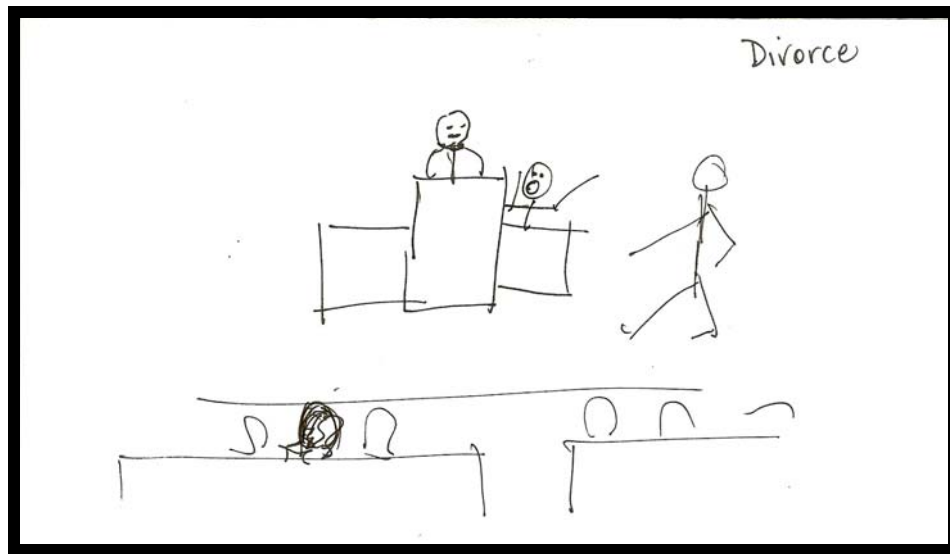
We are the sum of our experiences and Jackie has taken her traumatic experiences and used them as stepping stones to a brighter future. Her main regret from the divorce is the loss of her relationship with her younger son. He has been to see her several times, but their relationship has been tainted by her ex-husband's anger and resentment toward her. She may not have left had she known that she would lose her son, but she may have lost her life instead. Looking back, she knows she made the right decision.

*Visual Interpretation*



*Figure 17.* Jackie's view of her marriage.

Jackie stated that the biggest part of their marriage involved activities with the children. Her husband is pictured with the whistle around his neck on the right side of the drawing. He is coaching the team...giving orders. His son is the “star of the show” and is pictured near the center. Jackie is pictured on the top left and described her role in the following: “I’m here with the ice chest, loading the minivan...the baby in the stroller. I’m providing the refreshments for the team. We didn’t do a family outing, like a picnic, this was for the show. There are other people watching. I’m the team mom; he is the coach.” Jackie’s marriage seemed to revolve around her husband’s plans and interests which were often just for show. His need to feel important and have control dominated their relationship (see Figure 17).



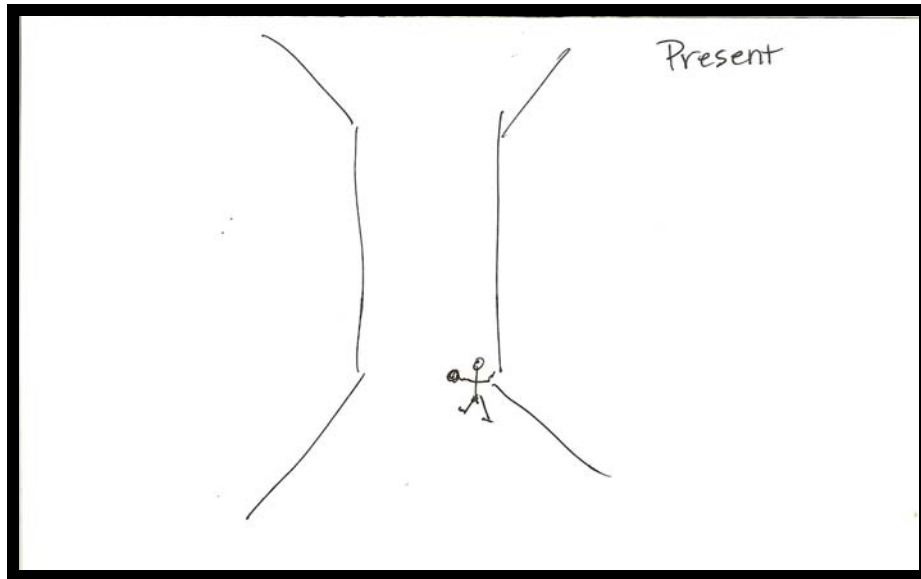
*Figure 18.* The courtroom scene at Jackie's divorce.

Jackie's divorce was the climax to a long period of threats and scare tactics from her husband. Jackie explained what happened during the divorce proceedings in the following:

This is the courtroom scene. My ex is sitting in the witness chair...he is screaming. I'm sitting out here with my lawyer. My counselor from the crisis center even came because she wanted to see it. This was the last time I remember seeing him in court; he got led out of there in handcuffs. My lawyer is here. He didn't have a lawyer because all his lawyers had quit him. He was his own lawyer.

Jackie's husband is shown in the picture with his hands waving and his mouth open. He even appears to be screaming at the judge. After the judge told Jackie that the court

could not protect her from her ex-husband, she decided to change her identity and move away. This was the only way she could be safe and she took it (see Figure 18).



*Figure 19. Jackie's life in the present.*

Jackie moved away, changed her identity and made a home for her daughter until she graduated from high school. When her daughter went to college, Jackie moved to Houston in order to take a design job with a large hospital. In this drawing, Jackie depicts her new life in the city. She explained her drawing in the following:

I'm drawing a big building, a tall building. And I'm a little person...like Mary Tyler Moore...(singing)...*Well, it's you girl and you've gotta show it...*walking down the street. See my hat. It's someplace I've never lived before...in a

city...it's cool. I wouldn't live there with children, I don't think, but, by myself, it's good.

Jackie's drawing shows her feeling small in a city with tall buildings all around. Even though this is a strange setting for her, she is not afraid. She stated, "I am stronger than I would have thought I would be" (see Figure 19).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Emergent Themes from the Study**

This study examined the self-perceptions of seven mid-life women concerning their experience of divorce. Because each woman possessed a unique personality and temperament, as well as diverse childhood and marital experiences, the stories are different. However, each story contains areas of similarity as each woman faced and overcame challenges, heartache, and loss. These similarities contribute to the emergent themes and findings of this study. Three major themes emerged from this study and will be discussed in the first section of this chapter: 1) letting go of the dream; 2) religious values bring an added burden; and 3) the struggle of moving from dependency to resiliency.

#### *Emergent Theme 1: Letting go of the Dream*

The first theme recognizes that women of the baby-boom and pre-baby boom generation expected to have a “happily ever after” marriage that would provide love, trust, and security until the death of a spouse. The dream for their marriages was one in which the husband and wife stayed married, loved each other, and were happy. The idea of growing old with their family unit intact was their expectation. Having their children and grandchildren around them while they sat with their spouse in their rocking chairs on the porch was the “dream.” When divorce happened the women had to face the

realization that their dream would not come true; letting go of that dream was a devastatingly difficult challenge.

For all seven women in the study, their parents remained married until the death of a spouse. All of these “parental” marriages were judged to be happy or relatively happy except in the case of Fina’s parents. Fina stated that her mother “endured” her marriage to a husband who was unfaithful. Fina’s mother had eleven children and no education, so she did not have the choice to leave her husband. Fina chose her role model for marriage from the television show, *Leave It to Beaver*, because she did not want a marriage like her parents’ marriage. Bobbi and Shirley also used the *Leave It to Beaver* television show as an example of how they wanted their marriage to be. In the show, the husband and wife were always kind and loving to each other, never fought, ate supper together each night, lived in a comfortable home, had great kids, and never worried about money. Of course, all of this was “pure Hollywood” and not real life, but it was “the dream” that they wanted in the fantasy of an ideal marriage.

According to Hagemeyer (1986), the loss of the dream occurs in most marriages. The partners may face initial disappointment that their expectations are not turning out as they had hoped; but they may go on to develop a more mature relationship based on more realistic expectations. Many long-term marriages have met this hurdle and overcome it through perseverance and hard work. For the women in this study who had been married for twenty years or more, the loss of the dream involved working hard to make a marriage work and then finding that all of their efforts had been in vain.



Letting go of the dream was a two-part process in the seven cases in this study. The first stage occurred when the women realized that their expectations for their ideal marriages were not turning out to be as they had planned. The second stage occurred when they realized that the marriage was over and their dream of “growing old together” would not become a reality.

Letting go of the dream can be compared to the first stage in Paul Bohannon’s (1970) six stations model of divorce. He identifies the first stage as the “emotional divorce.” This is the first visible stage of a deteriorating marriage where the partners withhold emotion, grow apart, and become mutually antagonistic. For Fina, part one of the loss happened at about the ten-year mark when she found out that her husband had “stolen” the \$10,000 she had saved for her children. For Shirley, the first loss occurred when their first child was born. Her husband began to feel “left out” and he withdrew emotionally from her and their child. Shirley also grieved for the “loss of love” which she felt was lacking in her marriage from the early stages. For Jackie, it began on their honeymoon when her husband left her at the casino and said he would “meet her in an hour” and continued when he accused her of being unfaithful with her co-workers. Another time early in the marriage he threatened her by saying that she “would be looking over her shoulder for the rest of her life” if she ever left him.

These three women, Fina, Jackie, and Shirley were the initiators of the divorce. Their experiences are different from the others in that they grieved for their marriages before the event of the divorce. Green (1983), states that most people have contemplated divorcing their partner on the average of five years prior to actually

leaving, thus giving time for emotional detachment. Being the “initiator” in the divorce impacts adjustment to the divorce because it gives one a sense of control over the event and allows time to consider all of the factors involved (Pettit & Bloom, 1984).

The other four women, Louise, Jeanna, Bobbi and Marilyn, were “noninitiators” in the divorce. Goode (1956) found that the “noninitiators” in the divorce were more likely to be the most highly traumatized. In a sudden event, the most common reactions are shock, denial, disbelief, anger, and confusion. All of these emotions were present for these four women. Jeanna, the only one who did not work, would not leave her house. All four women were depressed, withdrawn, confused and on the verge of “emotional break down.”

Louise and Jeanna had been married to men who made a habit of unfaithfulness. Both women had suffered the first stage of the letting go of the dream during the first few years of marriage when they found out that their husbands were having affairs. Both women continued to remain in their marriages in hopes that their husbands would change their ways and come back to them and be faithful. Jeanna had even divorced her husband and remarried him prior to the final break-up. The beginnings of the emotional divorce started in the first few years of marriage when their husbands chose to be unfaithful. Time after time, these men came back and their wives took them back. Louise even thought things were going very well when, on the eve of their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, her husband told her he was leaving. On the day of her divorce, Jeanna expected her husband to stop the proceedings and come back to her because he had come

back so many times before. The final letting go of the dream occurred when they realized that their husbands would not be there to “grow old” with them.

For Bobbi, part one of letting go of the dream occurred early in the marriage when she found out that her husband had a temper and on occasion this resulted in physical violence toward her. The birth of their first child also contributed to the tension in the marriage because of added responsibilities. Bobbi’s husband was also very autocratic and demanded that she cook his food a certain way, clean the house a certain way, and generally do everything “his way.” The second stage and emotional divorce occurred about sixteen years into the marriage when her husband brought “the other woman” into the family as his “project.”

Marilyn felt part one of letting go of the dream early in the marriage when her husband changed his demeanor from sweet and considerate to selfish and uncaring. He explained it later as needing to show her who was in control so she would “know who was boss.” The beginnings of the emotional divorce occurred later in the marriage when she began to see that their relationship was not going to be like she had expected. She explained,

I hoped to have a marriage like his parents’ marriage. His dad was a good provider (like mine had been) and they attended church together. His parents seemed to love each other and their children. That is what I wanted. My husband had a hard time keeping a job; he would get mad and quit. I felt like we would never settle down anywhere and make a home. Eventually we did settle down while the boys were in school; but after our youngest son graduated, we

had to move again because he could not make a living where we lived. Toward the end, I could see things slipping away and him blaming me for his problems, even before the other woman came into the picture.

For Bobbi and Marilyn, their husbands did not have a series of affairs but chose to leave their wives for a single “other woman.” For these women, it was a shock because their husbands did not have a history of infidelity. With both Bobbi and Marilyn, the other woman was younger and “a friend of the family.” Both husbands wanted to “help” this younger woman who “needed” them. The attraction of their husbands to these women was obvious to Bobbi and Marilyn but their husbands refused to stop seeing the younger women. Eventually, these relationships led to divorce.

Being discarded by your husband after 20 years of marriage or more is a traumatic event. According to Wallerstein (1986), women in the over 40 age group “felt aggrieved and angered after having worked hard to fulfill the requirements of being a devoted wife and mother” and then being cast aside by their husbands. Jeanna explained it this way,

I had this dream of us growing old together...and our grandchildren. Plus, I was with him from the bottom up...financially...and its not that I need his money...but I stuck by him through thick and thin and I got nothing out of it.

Letting go of the dream encompassed all of the expectations these women had prior to marriage. These included love, trust and faithfulness *until death do us part*. It also included the expectation of how they wanted their marriages to end which was like their parents, who had stayed together for their entire marriage. Realistically, they knew

that they would encounter problems, but they expected to work them out and “live happily ever after.” All of these women “never expected to get a divorce.” When the divorce happened, the women had to learn to adjust to their new paradigm and build a new “dream” for themselves.

*Emergent Theme 2: Religious Values Bring an Added Burden*

Religious values shaped the lives of all seven participants in this study. Bobbi and Shirley actually met their husbands at church. Marilyn attended church with her future husband and his family while they were still in high school. Louise, Fina, Jackie, and Jeanna were all reared in Christian homes that viewed marriage as a vow that was not to be broken. All of the parents of the women had remained married until the death of a spouse. The last thing any of the women expected was to be divorced.

All of the marriages started out with high hopes. As time went by and problems arose, the women accepted the reality of the situation and continued to hope for the best. They also prayed for guidance from God. Shirley, Bobbi, and Jackie sought guidance from Christian counselors in the early years of their marriage. Many of the women prayed that God would change their husbands. Louise and Jeanna had husbands who were unfaithful for years. They continued to take them back and forgive them and pray for God to change them.

Shirley, Fina and Jackie were unhappy for years, but their strong religious values prevented them from getting a divorce. For these women, divorce was not an easy option to consider due to their upbringing and their belief systems. Fina explained that in the Hispanic culture, you did not divorce. Her mother had “endured” a bad marriage

and she was expected to do the same. Both Shirley and Jackie had strict religious backgrounds which honored marriage as a covenant with God. Religious counselors encouraged them to be better wives and that would turn their spouses into better husbands. Therefore, they did not divorce in the early days of their marriages, but stayed the course for twenty years or more. Eventually all three women felt that they had no choice but to leave. They had contemplated divorce for not five but ten years or more. When they did divorce, they were not “emotional basket cases” but were determined to find a better way to live.

For Louise, Marilyn, and Jeanna, the divorce was not something they wanted and they prayed for a “miracle.” Marilyn explained,

When my husband told me he wanted a divorce I was devastated. I knew that I didn't want things to be like they had been, but I also felt that God could ‘change’ my husband into a better version of himself. So, I prayed that He would perform a miracle and give us a marriage of companionship and love.

Jeanna also asked for a miracle on the day that she went to the courthouse for their divorce. She remembered, “Down at the courthouse that day, I went to San Fernando Cathedral and prayed on my knees and I thought, ‘Please let something happen.’ And of course it didn't.”

Guilt is another aspect of the divorce equation. Goode (1956) writes about the distress involved in divorce, and believes that it stems from guilt as a moral, religious, or personal failure. The women who initiated the divorce felt guilty for breaking their marriage vows. The non-initiators felt guilty for not being a “good enough wife” to keep

their husband satisfied at home. The initiators felt guilt for hurting their spouse and his family. There is also the guilt they all felt for causing pain to their children and their extended families due to their actions in their own grieving process. When the women wanted to die, they felt guilty for not having enough faith to prevent themselves from feeling that way.

The women often questioned their faith and asked why God could let this happen to them, especially when both partners were Christians. The answer that Marilyn found was that her husband had a free will and God would not interfere with man's free will.

In a study by Nathanson (1995), 83% of the respondents found that the divorce experience ultimately strengthened spirituality. Struggling through the divorce and relying on faith in God for support, even in the darkest moments, caused the women in this study to develop a deeper faith in God's love for them. The smallest details of their lives were touched by God's provision. Jackie felt that God's providence brought her to College Station and allowed her to find a job and a place to live without proper identification or credentials. Marilyn was so depressed and anxious that she had a very difficult time making decisions. She felt that God guided her to take the first step in moving to a new location. Marilyn explained,

I knew I needed to move away from the area where my husband was living because my only feelings there were those of intense pain. So, when I looked for a new job, I thought College Station would be a good area. It just happened that a former student of mine lived there. I found an apartment near her and I spent every day when I got home from work with her and her children for the next

year. This was God's providence in providing me with a family when mine had been taken away. At my job, I met a woman who told me about her ex-husband who was a kind, caring man. I met this man by accident at a dance and we became friends and now we are married. So, even though God did not perform a miracle in changing my ex-husband, he gave me a new husband who is more suited to my personality and needs than my first husband. All of these "God-incidences" have strengthened my faith.

In each case, the religious values of the women were often seen as a burden when making decisions about divorce. For the initiators, guilt was a major factor which caused a delay in filing for divorce. For the non-initiators, hoping and praying for a miracle delayed acceptance of the facts concerning the infidelity of their husbands prior to the divorce. The guilt and questioning of faith continued to be burdens during and after the divorce. In the final analysis, all of the women relied on their faith to meet the challenges of divorce and felt that their faith was strengthened in the process.

*Emergent Theme 3: The Struggle of Moving from Dependency to Resiliency*

The third emergent theme involves the struggle to meet the challenges of divorce and move from dependency to resiliency. According to Seibert (1996), the roots of human resiliency are the inner resources of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept. When these are strong, positive and healthy, one can cope with divorce, job loss, and other life adversities. If these inner resources are not strong, coping skills are weak (Seibert, 1996).



All seven women in the study stated that they were optimistic and out-going as children. Marilyn explained that she was a leader in school and liked to be “in charge” which was both bad and good in her marriage. Fina explained that she always liked to “take over and then after awhile when she was the leader she started resenting it.”

For all of the women in the study, divorce was an extreme blow to their self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as your emotional opinion of yourself or how you feel about yourself as a person (Siebert, 1996). Even though all of the women had been self-assured before they were married, the dynamics within the marriage itself often caused their self-esteem to be undermined. Jackie was “outgoing and sure of herself” as a child but after she married, her husband’s constant accusations eroded her self-esteem as she explained:

My husband was a lot more fun before we got married. After the marriage he became more possessive. Little by little there were accusations that I was flirting with somebody or cheating. I became so fearful that he would get mad, that I kind of withdrew and gradually got less and less outgoing.

Shirley also stated that she was an “optimist” as a child and very outgoing. She grew up in a family where her mother saw the positive side of everything. But when she married, her husband was “an eternal pessimist.” The marriage detracted from her self-esteem as she explained, “Anything that happened, he couldn’t see the good in it; so, he pulled me down.” Bobbi also described herself as optimistic and outgoing when she was a child. However, she was married to a man who was very domineering. She described him as “very good at manipulating and very, very critical of just about everything.”

The marriage relationship undermined the self-esteem of these women and the divorce leveled the death blow. Many of the women blamed themselves for the break-up of their marriage. Jeanna stated,

I lost such self-esteem, because I kept thinking it was my fault. Did I not save enough money? Was I not attentive enough...am I not sexy enough...especially when there is another woman involved.

Even though the marriages often brought attacks on the self-esteem of the women, they were also dependent on the marriage for their lifestyle, identity and financial and emotional security. Most of the women had never lived alone; they went from their parent's home to their husband's home. Being alone and without the financial support of a spouse was devastating to Jeanna. She explained, "I married when I was 19 years old. I went from my daddy's house to my husband. I had never, ever lived alone until I was 51 years old." Jeanna also had the added burden of not having job skills and no experience in the workforce. She was totally dependent upon her husband for financial support when they divorced.

Many of the women had good jobs and were able to support themselves financially, but the loss of the family unit and the companionship of husband and children was the most difficult adjustment. Marilyn remembered, "When I moved out of our home and into an apartment, I couldn't even take my dog. I was so alone. I cried myself to sleep every night for weeks." Bobbi also had a difficult adjustment when she moved out of their home, because her husband moved his "other woman" in right away.

Bobbi explained, “It was devastating, especially when you knew someone else was waiting in the wings and was there fixing breakfast for your son and everything.”

In order to meet the challenges involved in dependency and low self-esteem, the women had to learn to develop resilience. According to Seibert (1996), resilience can be strengthened in individuals by focusing on the three inner resources of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept. Factors such as family support and religious faith can also help with the development of resilience after a crisis. Greff & Van Der Merwe (2004) identified seven resilience factors which contributed to stability after divorce. These included *intra-family support* (support family members provide each other), *family support* (support from extended family), *support of friends*, *faith* (belief in a higher power – 99% Christian), *financial and work security* (especially if the parent was female), *alternative resources* (neighbors, schools, and churches), and *family hardiness* (how well the family can handle the crisis).

For the women in this study, the main factor which contributed to resilience was focusing on their work or career. For several of the women, work was their therapy. Louise spent “70 to 80 hours a week working.” Jeanna had never worked before the divorce but found a job after the divorce and credits the ability to work as what helped her gain her independence. All of the women continued to work during and after the divorce and attributed their recovery to the ability to focus on their work. Work provided activity to fill the days and a sense of accomplishment which contributed to their self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-concept.

Support from friends and family also helped the women with the challenges of living alone, finding new activities, and learning to be a single person. Several of the women stated that they did not have any women friends prior to their divorce, but made new friends among other single women after the divorce. These relationships have become stronger than friendships they held prior to their divorce.

Faith and belief in a higher power were also important to the women in this study. Marilyn and Jackie felt that God was leading them to make decisions about moving to a new location. Doors were opened and people were placed “in the right place, at the right time” to effect outcomes with their living arrangements, job placement, and social activities. Both of these women feel that God provided what they needed when they needed it.

All of the women credited their faith in God with keeping them from “going crazy” during the worst of the crisis. Bobbi and Shirley relied on their Sunday school class for support, especially on Sunday’s after church. Marilyn, Jackie, and Louise attended a divorce recovery class at church. Fina and Jeanna stated that they prayed about everything that was happening and asked God for guidance. For these women, their faith was what sustained them in the most devastating time of their life.

Creativity is also seen as a factor that contributes to resilience. Metzl (2008) found that specific traits linked with creativity such as originality, flexibility and extroversion help predict emotional resilience. Flach (2004) states that creativity is an essential part of resilience and that creativity is called upon to rearrange the facts of a situation into a “new normal” where the individual can thrive. Of the seven women in

the study, five were in creative professions or had creative hobbies. Louise and Jackie are interior designers; Fina is a cosmetologist; Bobbi is in insurance, but was an Art major in college. Marilyn decorates her homes and offices and sees interior decorating as another possible vocation. Engaging in creative professions and pastimes helped these women during the transition from married to single. In all seven of the women, the creative personality traits of extroversion, flexibility and originality were used to “unlearn old strategies in favor of new ones.” This process according to Flach (2004) is called “reintegration.” Reintegration is the ability to survive and thrive after a trauma such as divorce.

Even though divorce was not something that any of the women wanted, they have all found strength, autonomy and resilience through the struggle. Each woman wondered if she would ever be happy again. Though it was difficult at the time, every one of the participants has made the transition successfully, as evidenced by their stories and their drawings; and, yes, all of them are happy.

### **Summary – Research Questions**

The research questions which provided the framework for this study were:

1. What were the greatest challenges and losses experienced by mid-life women after divorce?
2. How did the women develop resilience during the divorce process and what coping mechanisms were used by mid-life women following divorce?
3. What are the long-term effects of divorce on mid-life women several years after the divorce?

*Question 1: What Were the Greatest Challenges and Losses Experienced by Mid-life Women after Divorce?*

The first finding states that the loss of the dream was one of the greatest losses experienced by these mid-life women in divorce. The loss of the dream includes the loss of the “happily ever after” story they had dreamed of all of their lives. Mid-life women grew up with *Cinderella* and *Snow White*. These stories assured them that “someday your prince will come” and you will “live happily ever after.” Television shows pictured perfect families where the fathers went to work and the mother stayed home and everyone had enough money, did not fight, and everything was “perfect.” Obviously this picture was faulty, but baby boom women believed it and wanted it for themselves.

Of the seven women in this study, only Fina had a childhood which was not similar to the expectations of the time. All of the parents stayed together until one of the couple died and most reported being “fairly happy.” Louise reported that her daddy “adored her mother and did everything for her.” She had those same expectations of her husband. But her story did not end like she expected, as she explained, “I lost the family unit...that happily ever after syndrome...which means I did not see us being able to retire to Marble Falls and sit on the porch in our rocking chairs.”

The second finding states that divorce for mid-life women meant the loss of a lifestyle that included a marriage partner, family unit, financial security, home, and identity as a married person. All of these losses were accompanied by the challenges of learning to live without the person or thing that was lost. All seven women stated that the loss of the family unit was the most difficult loss they experienced and the second

most difficult loss was the loss of being a part of a married couple. They also lost assets, homes, and financial support. These losses relate to Bohannon's (1970) legal divorce, economic divorce, co-parental divorce, community divorce, and psychic divorce. The loss of a partner relates to Hagemeyer's (1986) loss of physical accessibility.

Hagestad and Smyer (1982), state that divorce is a "multifaceted process of multiple social and psychological ceasings." Each social, financial and psychological bond that must be broken requires a ripping apart of something that was supposed to last a lifetime. For the women who were noninitiators of the divorce, each change was a painful event leading to a conclusion they did not want.

The legal divorce for these women took from six months to a year and six months. During this time, most of the women began a "new life" by making changes in living arrangements. Fina told her husband to leave their home and she stayed in the home. Jeanna and Louise also remained in their homes. Marilyn, Bobbi, Jackie and Shirley moved out and started living in apartments. Marilyn and Jackie actually relocated to different towns. Marilyn left because she did not want to see her husband with the "other woman" and Jackie left because her husband would not leave her alone. For most of the women, this was the first time they had ever lived alone.

The actual separation from the spouse may be the beginning of the loss of physical accessibility, but in several cases this began before they physically separated. For Bobbi, they had not been intimate for several years and did not share a bedroom. In Shirley's case, they had not shared a bedroom in several years. For Marilyn the physical separation occurred when her husband became involved with the other woman and he

moved into the guest room, which was about a year before Marilyn moved out. Fina, was in constant turmoil with her husband and did not share physical intimacy in the later years of the marriage. Louise believed that they were “putting their marriage back together” and was still intimate with her husband prior to his announcement that he was moving out. Jackie explained that intimacy was “expected” but there was no affection involved. Jeanna continued to be intimate with her husband because she thought if he was satisfied at home he would not want anyone else.

Separation from the spouse starts with the emotional divorce and moves on to the psychic divorce. The psychic divorce involves learning to live without the support of another person. It requires the person to establish a post-divorce identity. Being part of a marriage and thinking of oneself as a married person for 20 to 30 years is a hard habit to break. Even several years after the divorce, many of the women stated that they “still felt married.” Separating physically from the spouse is the first step in achieving the psychic divorce.

When a woman is no longer part of “a couple” and must face the challenge of learning to go places alone, she enters the world of singles. This new stage is the community divorce. Bohannon’s (1970) community divorce requires finding new communities with which to become involved. Divorce means that women must start over in areas such as friends, living arrangements, jobs, and relationships with the opposite sex. These changes come at a time when the women are most vulnerable. According to Hayes & Anderson (1993), women who transition successfully through the post-divorce period, report developing new and closer friendships with women than they



had prior to the divorce. For the majority of the women in the study, this was definitely the case. Louise explained her relationships prior to the divorce in this way, “He (my husband) was my very best friend. I did not have close friends other than my sister. She was my best friend, if it had to be out of the (husband-wife) relationship.” Later, after the divorce, Louise explained how her friendships with others in a divorce group helped her heal in the following:

The friends that I met actually made me feel better about myself. In the past I had my family relationships, but I realized that my brothers and sisters in Christ were actually stronger and had more meaning than my family, which is hard to believe knowing how close my family is to me.

Jeanna, Shirley and Fina, relied on family members for support during the most difficult days after the divorce. Bobbi, Jackie and Marilyn did not live near their families and relied on new friends they made at church, at work, and in divorce recovery groups. Marilyn also relied on a former student who lived in College Station for emotional support during the separation and divorce.

As part of the legal divorce, the economic divorce (Bohannon, 1970) includes the division of property and allocation of assets and liabilities in a way that is acceptable to both parties. Most often, women are the most economically disadvantaged after a divorce (Uhlenberg, Cooney, & Boyd, 1990). In almost every case, the division of property affected the living standards of the women in the study. Fina was the only person in the study who did not lose assets in her divorce. She explained,

I told him the day he left, ‘You see everything in this house, if you find something that belongs to you, I want you to take it.’ He didn’t take a thing, I had provided for everything.

Shirley, Bobbi, Jackie, and Marilyn moved into apartments and left their homes prior to the divorce. Shirley, Bobbi, and Jackie had nice homes in the suburbs; Jackie even had a pool. Marilyn lost a home and 40 acres in the divorce. She had received an inheritance from her mother and had used it in the purchase price of the place. However, since the money was “co-mingled” with her husband’s assets, and the debt on the land, barns, and house were all given to him; she got nothing in the divorce.

Louise and Jeanna kept their homes, but both lost the income that their husbands had provided. Louise had a job and continued to work, so she was able to support herself. Jeanna, had never worked, so she was in a difficult position. A friend gave a birthday party for her and she explained her situation prior to the party in the following:

I had my place up for sale. I couldn’t pay for it, because I was too depressed to work. And I wasn’t going to give it to my ex and his girlfriend to live in. So, I got enough money with my VISA card to buy groceries. I was too proud to even ask my mother or anybody.

At the party one of their friends offered her a job and ultimately this job saved her from financial disaster.

“The most enduring pain of divorce is likely to come from the coparental divorce” (Bohannon, 1970, p. 45). Jackie and Bobbi felt the devastating effects of losing a child in their divorces. Bobbi’s youngest son decided to stay with his father and

visited Bobbi on week-ends. When Jackie's youngest son chose to live with his father, she actually did not see her son for several years, due to the fact that she had to hide from her ex-husband. Louise's son lived with her and her daughter was married. Louise recalled that she relied on her son, perhaps, too much during the divorce. She explained, "My greatest regret is the emotional issues I dumped on my son."

Marilyn, Jeanna, Shirley, and Fina all had grown children at the time of the divorce. Having grown children did not blunt the pain for Marilyn due to the fact that her sons gravitated to their father. She explained:

One of the most difficult things for me was knowing that my children were with their dad and the other woman in our home that I had planned and decorated.

When my oldest son and his wife "double dated" with my husband (we were not divorced yet) and this woman, it nearly broke my heart.

All seven women agree that holidays are difficult for divorced families. The loss of the ability to plan for the holidays and know that your children will be there is a difficult adjustment for divorced women. Bobbi explained, "Thanksgiving and Christmas are very, very hard because their dad is so controlling." Fina stated,

I feel the loss of being together as a family...you know, the holidays when we're together with my grandbabies. It causes a lot of tension. My children want to be with me most of all, but also with their daddy. So it is hard.

All of the losses from divorce are difficult for mid-life women because they had spent their lives working to keep their marriages together. Losing their marriage partner,

home, assets, and lifestyle were difficult, but losing their family units and having strained relationships with their children were the most traumatic losses (see table 1).

TABLE 1. Losses from Divorce Experienced by Mid-life Women

Type of Loss	Woman
I. Loss of the Dream	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Jeanna, Louise, Marilyn, Shirley
II. Loss of Family Unit	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Jeanna, Louise, Marilyn, Shirley
III. Loss of Identity as Married	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Jeanna, Louise, Marilyn, Shirley
IV. Loss of Home & Assets	Bobbi, Jackie, Marilyn, Shirley
V. Loss of Significant Income	Bobbi, Jeanna, Louise, Shirley
VI. Loss of Relationship with Children	Bobbi, Jackie, Marilyn

*Question 2. How Did the Women Develop Resilience During the Divorce Process and What Coping Mechanisms were Used by mid-life Women Following Divorce?*

All seven women in the study stated that they had been self-confident, optimistic and outgoing as children. Louise explained, “My grandmother always told me that I could do anything I wanted to do.” All of the women went into the marriage with high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. In some cases the marriage relationship took away their self-confidence and in others cases the divorce was destructive to their self-

esteem. In order to bounce back and become the women they had been before the divorce, they had to develop resilience.

According to Seibert (1996) resilience can be strengthened in individuals by focusing on three inner resources of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-concept. Resilience was developed through the process of meeting the challenges and losses from the divorce and overcoming them. Developing resilience occurred as the women coped with the losses from their divorce. As the women acknowledged each loss and overcame each challenge, their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept were strengthened.

In order to meet the challenges and losses from divorce, the women in this study searched for coping strategies that would help them survive. The major coping strategies and factors that contributed to developing resilience included working at a job or profession; support from family and friends; faith, church and spirituality; social activities and dating; divorce recovery groups; creative activities; professional counseling; and journaling.

According to Fisher & Alberti (2000), individuals utilize a variety of coping skills including denial, self-medication, and focusing in an area of life such as the workplace. Males tend to prefer seeking new intimate relationships while women seek help from family and friends to alleviate their distress (Colburn, Lin, & Moore, 1992). All of the women in this study stated that work was their “saving grace.” They also relied on family and friends for support and counsel during the most difficult times.

Jeanna was the only woman of the seven who did not have a career at the time of the divorce. She found a job through a friend and because of that job, she was able to

support herself and continue to stay in her home. She remembered, “Oh, my, gosh, that first paycheck, I was so thrilled. And I could support myself.”

Shirley, Bobbi, Jackie, and Fina also continued to work in their careers and credited work as their most effective coping skill. Louise threw herself into her work to “stay busy” during the worst part of her emotional struggle. She related, “I would work 70, 80 hours a week, it was either that or church. I would make myself; I would force myself into a better way of feeling.” Marilyn also used work as a coping skill during the worst part of the divorce trauma. She remembered, “When I was in front of my class, actually teaching, I could forget for awhile. I also showed a lot of movies to my students that year and I would sit in the dark and read scriptures and pray.”

Family and friends provided a resource for advice and counsel for all of the women in the study. Jeanna’s children offered her emotional support. Jeanna explained,

My kids were very supportive because of it being the way it was. They didn’t want their mama hurt...and especially my youngest, she lived right next door.

After the divorce, they didn’t want me to be by myself because of some violence and things.

Shirley and Louise also received support from their children. Shirley was always the main parent in the marriage and her children realized that she had “been through a lot.” Initially they were shocked by her decision to divorce their dad, but after they thought about it, they have given her “nothing but support ever since.” Louise recalled that her daughter was “very supportive, very understanding” during that time especially since she had recently gone through a divorce herself.

Parental and family support was important to all of the women. For Bobbi, Shirley, Louise, Jeanna and Jackie, their parents had realized earlier in the marriages, that there were problems. Most of the parents did not realize the extent to which the marriages had deteriorated. Marilyn's mother and sister had passed away and she relied on her dad and step-mother during this time. Her step-mother had been through divorce herself and could relate to what Marilyn was feeling. At one point, her step-mother said, "He's not worth this grief." Marilyn stated, "She was right, but I couldn't see it at the time." Fina relied on her sisters for support during the divorce process. One of her sisters was even present when Fina told her husband to leave.

Louise remembered that her parents were supportive, but she did not want their support. She was so angry and bitter that being around her family caused her more pain, so she chose to stay away from her family. She stated,

They wanted to come and rescue me. I didn't want their rescue. I didn't like to go to family gatherings because it made it even more real how alone I was. I told them they didn't understand, and they didn't!

Friends and co-workers also provided comfort and support during and after the divorce. Marilyn's parents did not live near her, so for day-to-day support she leaned on her co-workers at school. A teacher at her school was also going through a separation and they were able to comfort each other and be there for support and advice. Another teacher involved Marilyn in activities and encouraged her to be in a play and go camping. When she moved to a new town her former student was there to provide a "family" for her during the most difficult time.

Louise also relied on a younger person for comfort. One of Louise's nephews had a girlfriend and she lived with Louise during this time while she attended college.

Louise recalled,

When she moved in, I didn't really want to spend a lot of time talking to her, but she had her own issues and her own story. So, I think there was a healing process for both of us. She'd listen to me and I'd listen to her.

Faith in God and spirituality was important to all seven women. Jeanna and Fina stated that they prayed and asked God for guidance during their divorces, but, they did not attend church or engage in activities at church as much as the other women. For Bobbi, Jackie, Louise, Marilyn and Shirley, church activities and contacts at church became the hub of their social activities. Shirley remembered that she offered to change churches so her husband could continue at their home church. He decided to quit going to church. Shirley said that the church members tried to comfort him but he would not accept it. They were definitely comforting to her.

Bobbi and her husband had only recently moved to Texas, so she did not know many people in the area. Her Sunday school class became her support group, as she recalled in the following:

I had wonderful support from my Sunday school class. I can't tell you all they did for me. The hardest part, especially after losing my son, was going home from church alone. So, every Sunday, someone from Sunday school class either invited me to their house for dinner or invited me out to lunch. They were such a blessing.



Jackie remembered how her friends at church and even the youth minister were supportive during the divorce period. When Jackie decided to record her husband's abusive phone calls, the youth minister helped her. She stated, "The youth minister helped me make back-up copies of all my tapes. They (church members) were wonderful; they were so supportive and they understood." Jackie's faith helped her through the difficult times. Later when Jackie moved to escape from her abusive husband she remembered how she felt that God had opened the doors for her to lease an apartment, find a job, and enroll her daughter in school without the proper credentials and with only a shoebox full of cash.

Marilyn credited her belief in God for her ability to transition through the divorce with her sanity intact. She stated,

My belief in God is what saved me. I would have committed suicide without knowing that God was in control. I actually had visions of just pulling my car in front of a truck...but, obviously I did not do it. I had friends at church and they were supportive, but none of them really knew how it felt except one other woman who was going through divorce. Later, when I moved, I joined a divorce recovery group and that really helped.

Louise remembered using work and church for therapy and coping during this time. But, it was not until the divorce recovery group began that she was able to find real comfort from other people who were experiencing divorce.

Louise, Marilyn and Jackie participated in a divorce recovery group at their church. This group met on Sunday morning and Sunday night. It was through this group that real healing began. Louise recalled,

In 1995, a couple started a divorce recovery class. That's actually when my healing started...developing relationships outside of the family...hearing other people's stories...and realizing that I would never trade with anybody else. Hearing other people's stories made me realize that I wasn't as alone as I had been feeling.

Marilyn also participated in the same divorce recovery group. Her experience with the group was similar to Louise's. She stated,

I was able to be a part of a church divorce recovery group and this was the greatest source of help for me. Not only did it supply Christian support through church, it also provided me with a group of friends who knew what I was experiencing.

Before Jackie moved, she attended a divorce recovery class at her church. She remembered, "There was a divorce recovery group at the church where I went. I was surprised because three of the class members were from my neighborhood. I thought I'd be the only one in town." After she relocated to College Station, Jackie participated in the same divorce recovery group as Louise and Marilyn. It was through this group that she was able to get a job in her field without her credentials because a group member hired her and later helped her find another job as a designer.

All of the women in the study engaged in social activities with family and friends. Marilyn and Louise and other members of the divorce recovery group went on picnics, trips, and dancing. Fina, Louise, Bobbi, and Marilyn dated and eventually married. Bobbi and Marilyn are still married, but Fina and Louise were married for about five years, then divorced. Shirley and Jackie have dated occasionally and Jeanna has dated the same gentleman for several years. Dating was a self-esteem booster for all of the women as Marilyn explained in the following:

Being left by my husband for another woman devastated me. I thought no other man would want me. I felt ugly, fat, and worthless. But after my divorce was final, I started going out with friends and seeing other men. This was a big help, because it made me realize that I was attractive to other men, even if my husband did not want me.

Other methods of coping with loss were used by the women in the study (see table 2). Jackie, Louise, and Marilyn sought professional counseling during their marital problems and during the divorce. Jackie and Marilyn also used journaling to chronicle their journey through this difficult time. Creative activities were also a method of coping during the stress of the divorce. Louise and Jackie are interior designers and their work provided the creative outlet. Fina is a cosmetologist and her work is very creative, plus her activities away from work include interior design and party planning. Bobbi played the piano and did craft projects with a Sunday school class she was teaching. Marilyn is an amateur interior designer and decorated several houses during this time.

TABLE 2. Coping Mechanisms Used by Mid-life Women Experiencing Divorce

Coping Mechanism	Woman
I. Working at Job or Profession	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Jeanna, Louise, Marilyn, Shirley
II. Support of Family and Friends	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Jeanna, Louise, Marilyn, Shirley
III. Faith, Church and Spirituality	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Jeanna, Louise, Marilyn, Shirley
IV. Social Activities and Dating	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Jeanna, Louise, Marilyn, Shirley
V. Divorce Recovery Group	Jackie, Louise, Marilyn
VI. Creative Activities	Bobbi, Fina, Jackie, Louise Marilyn
VII. Professional Counseling	Jackie, Louise, Marilyn
VIII. Journaling	Jackie, Marilyn

*Question 3. What are the Long-term Effects of Divorce on Mid-life Women Several Years after the Divorce?*

*Long term negative effects.* Another finding from the research states that the long-term negative effects of divorce on mid-life women included: a loss of the family unit, loss of income and assets, continued anger, and psychological distress. Even

though the negative effects of the divorce have dissipated with time, the women in this study still feel the effects of certain losses.

The loss of the family unit is the one which is cited the most by the women in this study as a source of continuing distress. All of the other losses can be replaced, but the biological family cannot be replaced. Most of the women have grown children, but finding time for family gatherings at holidays and birthdays is difficult when the children need to divide their time among divorced parents and in-laws.

Loss of income and assets continues to be a problem for some of the women. Income and assets that would have been enjoyed by both partners are now being spent on a new wife or step-children. Often the children from the first marriage are neglected in favor of the husband's new family. As the women are getting older, the security of two incomes is something they miss. Jeanna's husband had a good job and always supported her, when he left, she had to support herself. Shirley lost her home and the financial support of her husband. She explained, "I lost a lovely house and now as I'm going on, it is the loss of financial security...two incomes are better than one."

One of the challenges of mid-life divorce is identified by Wallerstein (1986) as continued anger and bitterness. Wallerstein (1986) found that 44% of women and 20% of men were intensely angry at the time of the divorce and remained angry at the 10-year follow-up. Factors which contributed to this continued anger include the stress of being a single parent, continued anxiety about living alone, competition for loyalty of the children, and economic worries, especially if the husband was financially successful (Wallerstein, 1986).

For the women in this study anger was a problem at the time of the divorce and remained a problem for several years. Louise felt angry for the first three years and then decided to make an effort to get over it and let it go. She started sending birthday and Father's Day cards to her ex-husband. This seemed to help her and later they were able to become friends again before his death. Jackie was more afraid than angry and has worked hard on forgiving her ex-husband, but says she is "not quite" there yet. Marilyn was angry for 9 or 10 years and worried because she wanted to forgive and move ahead since her life was good now. She used a technique called EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing) to overcome her feelings of hurt and betrayal. This technique is used for overcoming anxiety, stress and trauma and for treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This technique finally gave her relief from the feelings of trauma and anger that she still felt. Shirley said that she had been angry during the marriage, but by the time of the divorce, she did not feel anything at all. Fina has forgiven her ex-husband, but is still angry with him. She stated, "Yes, I'm still angry. I would like to punch him, because he took my youth!" Bobbi stated that she was more hurt than angry and if she had any anger it was toward the "other woman" and not her husband. Jeanna said that she was still angry after 16 years. She explained it this way:

One part of me says, 'How dare he do that to me!' and the other part says, 'Thank you!' [That I don't have to put up with that any more.] I don't dwell on it and I know I have to forgive him...to go to heaven.

Anger and psychological distress, though extreme following the divorce, have dissipated with time. Several of the women still feel hurt, anger, and disappointment

from the divorce. All of the women state that they either “have forgiven” or “want to forgive” their ex-husbands, but may still struggle with feelings of unforgiveness.

For the women in this study the “noninitiators” were the most traumatized by the divorce. The betrayal of trust and the breaking of vows by the men they loved caused the women to spiral into severe depression and feelings of worthlessness. The women experienced the stages of grief and loss that one would at the death of a spouse, but without the support and comfort offered by the community when a death occurs. For Bobbi, Jeanna, Louise and Marilyn, the trauma of being cast aside for another woman was a devastating blow since each woman had spent her youth trying to be a good wife to her husband and a good mother to their children. All four of the women suffered psychological distress in the form of anxiety and depression for several years. Bobbi stated that she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Jeanna did not leave her house because she was so depressed. She stated, “I was not in my right mind for about 5 years.” Louise used anxiety medication and became a workaholic during this time. Marilyn had suicidal thoughts for several years, saw a professional counselor, and was on antidepressant medication for three years during the separation and after the divorce.

Fina, Jackie and Shirley were the “initiators” of the divorce and their psychological distress occurred during the marriage. Fina remembered feeling betrayed by her husband when he took the money out of her account that she had saved for her children. She remembered, “That was a big blow to me...I felt...how could you do that? It was terrible.” Jackie remembered feeling like she was more alone when she was married than when she was by herself. At night when her husband was passed out on the

couch, she would cry because she felt so alone. For Shirley, her husband's reclusive personality caused her to question whether he loved her from the very first. She also became cynical and did not believe that any marriages were happy, because her marriage was so unhappy. For these three women, the divorce was a relief and they all felt that they had a weight lifted off of them. Of these three women, only Shirley wonders if she could have "done something different" in order to have kept her marriage together.

*Long-term positive effects.* The mid-life women in this study experienced long-term positive effects such as: an increase in personal resilience, autonomy, strength, personal achievement, spiritual growth, and new insights on life. Learning to be resilient through hardship is a great gift. Becoming stronger and more autonomous is something all of the women in the study feel they have achieved. Marilyn expressed it this way:

I know that I can overcome anything with the help of God and my own resilience. I know that I am a stronger person because of the divorce. My life now is of my own choosing and I know that I am blessed.

Jeanna explained how she began to feel independent and autonomous after the divorce in the following:

I have taught myself one thing. I can live my life and it doesn't have to include a man. That doesn't mean that I don't enjoy my friend [the man she has dated for 9 years]. I am a great person and it doesn't have to involve my ex-husband. I always thought I was his wife. I had to be this special person. Well, you know what? I am a good person and it doesn't have a thing to do with him.

Fina stated that the divorce made her stronger. She also enjoys the freedom of



not being married. She explained,

I'm really busy and happy. I work hard and I play hard. I can do what I want to do. My husband always asked, 'Where are you going? What time will you be back? Who's going to be there?' That drives me insane. I'm too old for that.

Several of the women have made gains in their careers since the divorce. Bobbi did not work until the last few years before her divorce. She now owns her own insurance company and is financially secure. Louise and her business partner started a business following her divorce which has become very successful. Marilyn finished her Master's Degree in counseling, became a Licensed Professional Counselor and is now pursuing her doctoral degree. Jackie has moved up in her profession as an interior designer and worked for a university system before moving on to work for a large hospital. Fina and Shirley are also continuing to be successful in their careers. Jeanna is retired due to health problems.

Divorce was not what these women wanted, but it was what they were given. Through the emotional turmoil of divorce, all of the women relied on their faith in God to help them cope with the feelings of low self-esteem, betrayal, and grief. Louise explained it in this way:

I think God wanted me to learn...and I'm still learning. He set lessons before me for me to learn from everything I've gone through. And He brought me through all of this and almost into a utopia.

Jackie explained that she always had her faith. Her dad would tell her every

night on the phone to “always keep her faith.” When she moved to College Station and all the doors opened for her to get a job and an apartment without the proper identification, she knew it was the providence of God. She stated, “Right when I needed it, they were there. It gives me chill bumps.”

Bobbi and Marilyn both recalled being alone in a small apartment and feeling that no body cared about them. Both women turned to their faith in God to help them survive and heal during the most difficult time. Bobbi realized that she had to move on as she explained, “You are wasting your life and all the talents that God has given you if you hang on to your grief or desire for your marriage when your husband has left.”

The seven women in the study all learned lessons from the divorce and came away with new insights on life. Bobbi stated, “I believe that God’s perfect plan is one man for one woman. Unfortunately we’re not perfect; but God’s plan is still perfect.” Marilyn gave the following advice for women who are facing divorce, “Trust in God and turn it over to Him. If it is meant to be, God will bring it around. If not, your life will be better later. Just trust Him.” Shirley gave advice to women in similar circumstances, in the following: “Don’t wait. I think my girls might have had a happier life. But I thought I was doing the right thing. You can only try so long, if it’s not gonna fix, it’s not gonna fix.” Jeanna gave the following advice: “Live for yourself. Don’t blame yourself. Know that you can make it and not be dependent on your spouse. And always have a way to make a living, because when you are independent it is a wonderful thing.” Fina stated, “There is no sure shot on how people are going to change. Make yourself happy. If you are miserable, why do you want to go into your old age in misery?” Louise

stated, “With the help of God you can survive anything. You survive it and you come out on the other side of it. If I wouldn’t have gone through all of this stuff, I would not have realized the blessings I have now.” Jackie gave the following advice:

Cut your losses as soon as possible. It’s not going to get easier later....they are not going to change. And it’s not good for the kids. You stay for the sake of the kids, but you are only going to chance losing the kids that you are staying for.

### **Conclusions**

The divorce experiences of the seven women in this study aligned with many areas of research explored in the literature review. These research areas from Chapter II include: factors affecting adjustment, challenges and losses from divorce, resilience and coping with loss, and long term effects of divorce. In the following section, these categories serve as a framework to discuss the observations and conclusions relating previous research to the present study.

#### *Factors Affecting Adjustment*

Bevino and Sharkin (2003) suggest that “initiator status” plays a role in divorce adjustment. The initiator of the divorce has time to consider all of the pros and cons before the divorce and the act of deciding to divorce gives one the advantage of feeling a sense of control. The “noninitiator” feels that the divorce is thrust upon them without their consent, thus, rendering them completely helpless. Green (1983) stated the most people have contemplated divorcing their partner on the average of five years prior to actually leaving. In this study, Fina, Jackie, and Shirley were the initiators and they all considered leaving their spouse for more than 10 years prior to the divorce. Goode

(1956) found that “noninitiators” were likely to be the most highly traumatized in the divorce. Bobbi, Jeanna, Louise, and Marilyn were noninitiators and they all suffered trauma in their divorces. Fina, Jackie, and Shirley were not traumatized but only felt relief or freedom after the divorce. Thus, the research in the present study agrees with previous research in these areas. Initiator status plays a role in the initial emotional response experienced by parties in the divorce. Initiators may spend as many as ten years considering their options before they decide to divorce. Noninitiators face the most trauma at the initial time of the divorce.

Goode (1956) found that a higher level of income was related to better adjustment and lower levels of stress. In the present study, six out of the seven participants had jobs or professions which supplied them with sufficient financial support after their divorce. Jeanna was the only participant who did not have a job. This lack of financial security caused severe stress until she was able to find work. The present study agrees with Goode’s (1956) finding concerning the relationship of higher income to lower levels of stress.

Goode (1956) found that higher social participation was also correlated with adjustment. Spanier and Castro (1979) found that participants who engaged in social activities with friends, family, and members of the opposite sex had fewer adjustment difficulties. Participation in social activities with family and friends was one of the ways the participants in this study learned to adjust to being single. Dating also aided in adjustment and boosted self-esteem for the women in this study. The present study agrees with the findings of Goode (1956) and Spanier and Castro (1979). The ability to

earn an adequate salary contributes to a less stressful transition during divorce.

Engaging in social activities with family, friends, and members of the opposite sex contributes to adjustment after divorce.

### *Challenges and Losses from Divorce*

Bohannon (1970) viewed divorce as a process of six stations including emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community and psychic divorces. The women in this study experienced all of the six stations of divorce identified by Bohannon (1970).

The emotional divorce occurred for most of the women in this study over a period of years. It actually occurred in two stages, one during the first few years and another at the time of the legal divorce. All of the women felt the beginnings of the emotional divorce when their husband's did not meet their pre-marriage expectations. This stage was identified by Hagemeyer (1986) as the "loss of the dream." Hagemeyer (1986) states that all marriages go through this to some extent, but many go on to develop more mature expectations for marriage. The second stage of emotional divorce or loss of the dream came when the women knew they would not have their "happily ever after" dream of marriage. The loss of the dream is one of the most difficult losses for mid-life women. Both Bohannon (1970) and Hagemeyer (1986) discussed the emotional separation of the couple as a single event. The current research identifies this separation as being divided into two stages with occurred at different times in the marriage.

The legal divorce lasted from as little as six months to a year and six months. This included the awarding of custody of children, division of assets, and dissolution of

the legal bonds of marriage. Uhlenberg, Cooney, & Boyd, (1990) stated that during the economic divorce, women are most often economically disadvantaged. When divorced women are compared to widows over the age of 40, divorced women are at greater financial risk, live closer to the poverty line, have higher labor force participation, and have fewer financial assets (Uhlenberg, et al., 1990). Immediately after their divorces, the seven women in the study conformed to the above statement by Uhlenberg, and others, however, the long-term effects of divorce on these women does not agree with this statement. Six out of the seven are still in the workforce, but their financial status is anything but near the poverty line. All seven women either own their homes or have owned a home recently. All of the women have financial reserves and Marilyn, Louise and Shirley own lake property while Jeanna and Fina own several acres of land in the country. These assets are owned independently of their husbands, if they are married. Immediately after the legal divorce, the women in this study were disadvantaged financially. However, the long-term effects show that the women are financially stable and may actually be in a better financial status than they were when they were married.

The most enduring pain of divorce is likely to come from the coparental divorce according to Bohannon (1970). Both Shirley and Bobbi lost primary custody of their sons during the divorce. This caused extreme heartache for both of these women. Even though Jackie was being emotionally abused by her husband, she stated that she probably would not have left him if she had known she would lose her son. Even though mid-life women most often have older children, the break-up of the nuclear family still disrupts the family unit. This disruption of the family unit is one of the greatest losses

for the women in this study. The loss of the family unit is one of the greatest losses faced by mid-life women in divorce.

The community divorce required the women to start over and find new communities with which to be involved. The women in this study had to find new places to live, new jobs in some cases, and new friends with which to socialize. They had to learn to see themselves as no longer part of a “couple” but as “single.” The community divorce often caused the women to seek out new friends who were also in the same circumstances. According to Hayes and Anderson (1993), the majority of women reported developing new post-divorce friendships and especially closer friendships with women than they had prior to the divorce. The women in this study found new and closer friendships with women they met through their church groups and divorce recovery groups. Louise reported that she had never had many women friends before her divorce but had developed very close friends after the divorce. Mid-life women experiencing divorce must find new communities and learn to view themselves as single rather than married. Making new friends among other women who are in the same circumstances leads to stronger and closer friendships than those held prior to the divorce.

The psychic divorce according to Bohannan (1970) can be a personally constructive state. Women who re-establish a strong individual identity often experience a heightened sense of competence and self-worth. Hayes and Anderson (1993) stated that women felt freer to be themselves and to meet their own needs after divorce and preferred their new freedom to marriage. In this study, Jeanna felt empowered after she

was able to support herself and gain her independence. Bobbi and Louise were able to achieve financial success in their individual businesses. Marilyn was able to build her dream house on a lake and pursue a doctoral degree. All of the women in this study have made the transition through the psychic divorce and have gained competence and self-confidence in the process. Women who make the successful transition through the psychic divorce develop a heightened sense of competence and self-worth.

Another challenge associated with mid-life divorce is psychological distress. Divorce is recognized as one of the most stressful events an individual will face in life (Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Dixon & Rettig, 1994). All seven women in this study experienced depression, grief, low self-esteem, and feelings of anxiety before, during and after the divorce. As the noninitiators, Louise, Jeanna, Bobbi, and Marilyn all experienced the deepest depression and grief. Louise and Marilyn took antidepressants and had thoughts of suicide. Marilyn described it as “open heart surgery without anesthetic.” In contrast, Fina, Jackie, and Shirley felt their marriages begin to deteriorate long before they decided to divorce. As the initiators, these women grieved for their marriages during the marriage rather than at the time of the divorce. This study confirmed that women experiencing mid-life divorce suffered with grief, depression, low self-esteem and feelings of anxiety.

#### *Resilience and Coping with Loss*

Resilience is defined as an individual's overall ability and disposition to positively adjust in the face of major adversity (McMillen, 1999). When applied to divorce, it is the ability to “bounce back” from the process of divorce to a former state of



positive adjustment (Quinney & Fouts, 2003). Greff & Van Der Merwe (2004) identified seven resilience factors which contributed to stability of individuals and families after divorce. These factors included: intra family support; family support; support of friends; faith; financial and work security; alternative support resources; and family hardiness. Flach (2004) identified creativity as a personality trait of resilient people. Creative individuals possess qualities associated with ego-strength, responsibility, self-control, tolerance, flexibility, originality and extroversion. These qualities help individuals adapt to the disruption caused by divorce. The factors which helped the women in this study “bounce back” included: a strong sense of self-worth acquired in childhood; a strong support system of family and friends; faith in God; financial and work security; and creativity.

Coping with loss and developing resilience go hand in hand in the post-divorce process. According to Fisher and Alberti (2000), individuals use a variety of coping skills including denial, self-medication, and focusing in an area of life such as the workplace. Males tend to prefer seeking new intimate relationships (Bevvino, 2000) while women seek help from family and friends to alleviate their distress (Colburn, Lin, & Moore, 1992). Some people turn to private counseling, church support groups, or divorce workshops (Quinney & Fouts, 2003). The women in this study chose to focus on work as their primary means of coping with their loss. They also relied on family and friends, their faith, church support groups, divorce workshops and private counseling. Several of the women also sought new intimate relationships and four of the women married, of these, two later divorced. The results of this study agree with the research by

Fisher and Alberti (2000), Bevvino, (2000), Colburn, Lin, & Moore, (1992), and Quinney & Fouts, (2003) as cited above. Developing resilience and coping with loss were facilitated by focusing on work; support from family and friends; faith in God; church support groups and divorce recovery groups; private counseling; and relationships with members of the opposite sex.

#### *Long-Term Effects of Divorce*

Long-term effects of divorce for mid-life women can be both positive and negative depending on the circumstances of the individual and their motivation to make the best of a difficult situation. Women in Wallerstein's (1986) longitudinal study who were over 40 at the time of divorce continued to feel lonely and rejected at the 10-year mark after the divorce. They were living in economic, social, and psychological conditions well below that which they had achieved during their marriage and many still felt unresolved feeling of anger. In the present study, all of the women were doing well financially, psychologically, and socially. They all had good relationships with their family and children. This finding did not agree with Wallerstein (1986). In the area of unresolved anger, only Louise, Shirley, and Jackie stated they no longer felt anger toward their spouse or the situation causing the divorce. Marilyn, Bobbi, Fina, and Jeanna stated that in the past they had struggled with resolving anger and were still angry occasionally.

Bevvino & Sharkin (2003) reported that 64% of female participants in their study identified changes in self and new opportunities for growth as a positive consequence of divorce. Quinney & Fouts (2003) state that the increase in resilience gained may have

long-term effects for facing future adversities. Nathanson (1995) reported that divorce caused women to question their faith, but ultimately strengthened their faith. He also stated that divorce facilitated personal growth and defining of values and goals for the future. Marks (1996), states that divorced women report advantages to single status such as increased autonomy and a higher level of personal growth. The present study agrees with Bevvino & Sharkin (2003), Quinney & Fouts (2003), Nathanson (1995), and Marks (1996) in their findings concerning positive effects of divorce. Even though divorce had negative effects, most of them diminish with time. The positive effects of increased resilience, autonomy, strength, and spiritual growth are lasting outcomes of divorce.

### **Future Research Possibilities**

The stories of mid-life divorce from the viewpoint of women suggest that another study be done from the perspective of men. If available, the stories of the former spouses of the women interviewed in this study would be most interesting and informative. The research questions would include those similar to the present study concerning losses, coping skills, and long-term effects of the divorce.

The women in this study were all well-adjusted and not bitter at this stage of their healing from the trauma of divorce. There are obviously other women who have not healed and are not well-adjusted, even ten years or more since their divorce. A study of the differences in the lives and philosophies of these women would be informative in determining why one group made a successful transition and the other did not.

Most of the women in this study were white, middle-class, educated women. Another study of African-American women, Hispanic women, and women of lower

socio-economic status would reveal a different set of data. Also women who have no job skills or education would provide a different viewpoint.

All of the women in this study were Christians and stated that their faith helped them cope with the heartache and betrayal of divorce. It would be interesting to know what people who are agnostic or atheist rely on for comfort during times of severe emotional trauma.

This study revealed that the “loss of the dream” scenario happened in two different stages; the first stage happened at the beginning when pre-marriage expectations were not met. And the second stage occurred at the end, when the women knew their marriages were ending. Another interesting study would be an in-depth investigation of the expectations held by men and women concerning marriage prior to marriage and how these expectations are fulfilled or not fulfilled in the marriage. Another question to be answered is: Do men feel the ‘loss of the dream’ just as women do? Or is there another loss which is more meaningful for men. Perhaps ‘the dream’ scenario would be different for men.

Research into how creativity is used as a coping mechanism for trauma is another topic with vast possibilities. Other traumatic events such as natural disasters, severe illness, and loss of a child would be traumas that could be investigated. In my experience, the desire to be creative during the worst part of the depression following trauma, was shut down for awhile. When the depression began to lift, the desire to be creative returned. It would be interesting to see if other people had the same experience.

The possibilities for further research into resilience, creativity, and coping with loss are endless.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PROTOCOL**

1. Tell me about your self-concept and self-esteem as a child.
2. Describe your parents' marriage.
3. What were your expectations for your marriage?
4. Tell me about your marriage in the early years.
5. Talk about your marriage as it deteriorated.
6. Tell me about your feelings at the time of your divorce.
7. How did you cope with the loss of your marriage?
8. What were your greatest losses from the divorce?
9. Discuss the long-term effects of the divorce.
10. Draw three periods in the divorce process: before, during, and after the divorce.

## VITA

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